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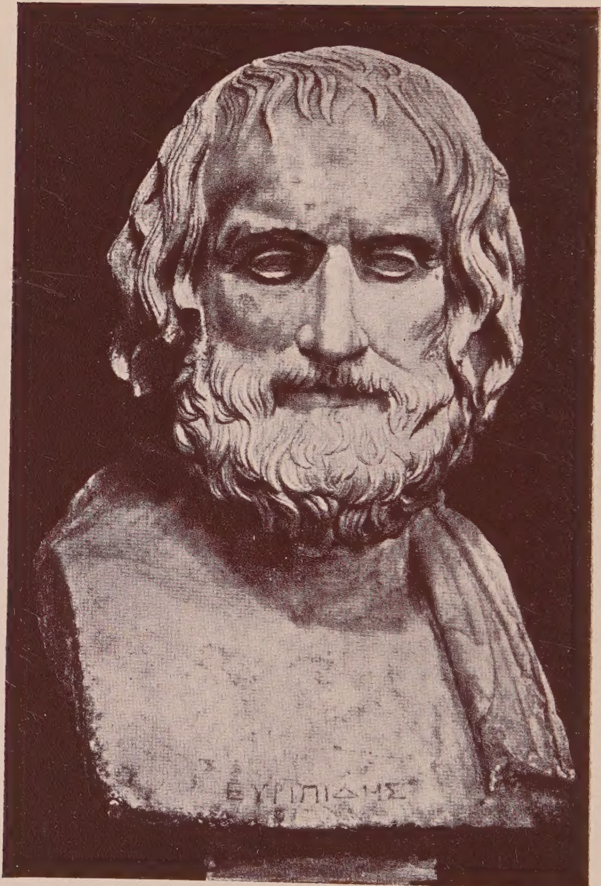
# EURIPIDES
# THE IDEALIST



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EURIPIDES

# EURIPIDES
## THE IDEALIST

By
R. B. APPLETON, M.A.

"What is divine thou, mortal, canst not stain."
HERACLES, 1232.

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TO
MY WIFE

# PREFACE

He who would rightly interpret an ancient author to the modern world is likely to be told that his interpretation is an unwarranted reading of modern ideas into the work of the author whom he is attempting to expound. But adequately to interpret anything means to make it, in some sense, one's own—to revivify it in one's imagination. In speaking about ancient history Gilbert Murray[1] says, "No good historian is content merely to repeat the record of the past. He has to understand it, to see behind it, *to find more in it than it actually says.* He cannot understand without the use of his constructive imagination, and he cannot imagine effectively without the use of his experience." If these words are true of history, they are truer still of the more purely imaginative forms of literature. Consequently in my attempt to interpret Euripides I have tried to find more in him than he actually says.

The reader may be interested to learn how the present work came to be written. As a schoolboy I was aware of some undefined but very definite difference between Æschylus and Sophocles on the one hand, and Euripides on the other. As an undergraduate I was introduced to the late Dr. Verrall's remarkable books, *Euripides the Rationalist* and *Four Plays of Euripides.* Since then many years have elapsed, and it was only with the passage of years that I found myself able to decide why I did not agree with these books. To put it briefly, I have realised that both Æschylus and Sophocles wrote from within the orthodox conventional circle of religious tradition. Euripides broke through that circle, and consequently Verrall supposed that his motive in writing was to break through it. But the matter is far more complex than this. Euripides does break through the circle of conventional religion, but he does so, as it were, in his stride. Life itself could no longer be contained within that circle at the time when Euripides wrote, and consequently he wrote as no Greek tragedian before him had written. In the *Hecuba*, for example, he has written a psychological study to show the result of cumulative blows of misfortune; in the *Andromache* a psychological study in female nature; in the *Troades* a counter-blast to Athenian imperialism; and in plays such as the *Alcestis* and the *Medea* a tractate on marriage, in order to show the inadequacy of contemporary ideas about woman. But the reader must judge of these things after reading this book.

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[1] *Aristophanes and the War Party*, p. 5.

I wish to record my very great indebtedness to Mr. Guy N. Pocock, without whose help this book would never have been published, and also to two of my friends, Mr. C. Amyes and Mr. W. D. Fraser, for their kindness in reading the proofs; and for permission to use copyright material thanks are due to Messrs. George Allen and Unwin Ltd., for "Mimnermus in Church," from *Ionica*, by William Cory, to the literary executor and Messrs. Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd., for an extract from *The Great Lover*, by Rupert Brooke, and to Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton Ltd. and Messrs. A. P. Watt and Son, for *Come, let us make love deathless, thou and I*, by Herbert Trench.

CAMBRIDGE, 1927. R. B. APPLETON.

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# INTRODUCTION

No one would deny that of the great Greek tragedians, Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, the last is the most modern of the three. We feel this in many ways —in the greater prominence of children in his dramas, in his treatment of slaves, and in his delineation of the feeling of repentance, as in the *Andromache*, or of the moral struggle, as in the *Medea*, *Electra*, *Orestes* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*. We also feel it in the fantastic nature of a play like the *Helena*, which has been aptly compared with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; but the feeling may be briefly described as that occasioned by the more complicated nature both of his plots and of his characters. The comparative complexity of the Euripidean plot, as contrasted with the plots of Æschylus and Sophocles, has been amply illustrated by the French scholar, Paul Decharme,[1] and the comparative complexity of the characters in Euripides is immediately perceived if we compare those which occur in legends treated by all three dramatists. Contrast, for example, the irresolution of Agamemnon in the pages of Euripides with the same character in Æschylus, or the trait of tenderness in the Euripidean Clytemnestra, or the remorse of Orestes with the corresponding characters of the earlier writer. There is a world of difference between the dramatic development of the Hermione or Aulid Iphigenia of Euripides and the "simplicity" of character of the Antigone or Ismene of Sophocles. This complexity is the reflex in literature of the greater social complexity of the days in which Euripides lived. Life itself no longer possessed the simplicity which it had in the days of Æschylus—aristocratic birth was no longer the sole criterion of virtue—and consequently the spirit of literature became less serene. Although democracy had been established at Athens, by the institutions of Cleisthenes, in the time of Æschylus, it had not then developed to the extent of leaving its mark on literature. Æschylus was himself an aristocrat, and wrote under the spell of an aristocratic tradition. What we nowadays call the life of "the masses" never had any existence in ancient Greece, and its Greek equivalent in the days of Æschylus was only gradually growing to self-realisation. Certainly literature was still concerned chiefly with the point of view of "the classes." Sophocles, though a contemporary of Euripides, stood aside from the influence of the new forces,[1] and the seething, complex life of the new democracy finds its first expression in the plays of Euripides, who tackles its problems, criticises its excesses, and appreciates its virtues.

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[1] *Euripides and the Spirit of his Dramas* (Eng. trans. by Loeb), pp. 224–46.

This social change is enhanced by an intellectual one, by the fact that Euripides lived after the Age of the Sophists, or—to put it more correctly—stood, as Sophocles did not, in the direct line of Sophistic influence. Himself something of a philosopher—he possessed one of the few libraries of antiquity—he was the associate of men like Anaxagoras and Protagoras, of Socrates and of Plato. The influence of the two last probably accounts for his not having been carried away by Sophistic teaching, and for his success in profiting by the truths which the great Sophists enunciated, without falling into the errors to which their doctrines so easily led.[1] Much has been written upon the influence of the Sophists, but the good which they did may be very briefly described as the raising of the problem of validity, both in ethics and in metaphysics. They taught men no longer to take things for granted, either on the external authority of tradition, or as objectively such as to our senses they appear to be. In the realm of metaphysics they stressed the subjective factor which is involved in any act of apperception, and showed that man is himself, in some sense, the centre of his world. We see the result of this new attitude, as it affected literature, in the new light in which Euripides views the affairs of everyday life. He was accused by Aristophanes of having lowered the dignity of tragedy by

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[1] Speaking of Euripides, Haigh (*Tragic Drama of the Greeks*, p. 217) says: "Though separated from Sophocles by an interval of only a few years, he seems to belong in reality to another generation, and to breathe a different spiritual atmosphere."

> Presenting common things with which we live
> And which we use (*Frogs*, 959.)

but, as we shall endeavour to point out, this was due, not to any failure to realise the dignity appropriate to tragedy, but to an enhanced perception of the inner fineness of those "common things" themselves. The Sophists had taught him that, like everything else, they *are* much what they *appear to be* to the seeing eye—whether of the soul or of the body. The bodily eye is but an instrument—we perceive *through*, but not *with*, our senses—and Euripides, unconsciously no doubt, would seem to have taken the Sophistic truth, that things are what they appear to man, and to have given it the right interpretation—that things are what the soul of man makes of them. In the sphere of ethics Sophistic teaching, with its stress upon convention, caused him to distrust the variable nature of external sanctions of conduct, and to seek for an immutable, internal one. The same influence induced him boldly to throw over all external authority in the matter of religion. But he did not blindly follow the lead of the Sophists. His own philosophical beliefs were, as we shall see, openly at variance with their teaching on many important points, but his beliefs could never have been what they were, had it not been for Sophistic teaching. Had Protagoras, for example, never taught that man is the measure of all things, it is to be doubted whether Euripides would have evolved so successful a "rationalistic" interpretation of much of the traditional religion as he has done.

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[1] See below, chap. vii.

All these points will be fully developed in the following chapters, but before we embark upon them, a few words must be said upon the vexed question of arriving at the personal views of a dramatist from the pronouncements of his *dramatis personæ*. Obviously we cannot take everything that is said in character as an expression of Euripides' own views. How then are we to discriminate? Decharme (op. cit., p. 20) holds that we may take as an expression of the poet's own views any idea which recurs a number of times in his dramas, and is developed with evident satisfaction, and in plays belonging to different dates; and he finds a second criterion in our knowledge of the character and situation of each of the *dramatis personæ.* Mahaffy [1] finds the poet's own views in (*a*) the soliloquies of his characters, and (*b*) the *first* strophe and antistrophe of his choruses, and further suggests that the actors may have had some conventional sign by which they warned the audience that what was coming was what Euripides himself thought! But we shall not be far from the truth if we follow Decharme, with one important reservation however. We must reverse the order of his two criteria; for it is the second one to which most significance should be attached. Unfortunately this principle cannot be applied to the fragments, which, in the case of Euripides, are very numerous; and consequently I have deliberately excluded their evidence, in the chapters which follow, except by way of confirmation. These fragments are exceedingly fascinating, and contain much that one is loth to leave aside in the study of Euripides, but I am so convinced that much misconception has arisen from the uncritical use of their evidence,[2] that I have resolutely determined to neglect it, except as ancillary to what can be gathered from an examination of the extant plays. It may be objected that, as the extant plays form little more than a fifth of the whole body of Euripides' original work, we are likely to fall into obvious error by thus limiting the field of our evidence. But it must be remembered that those of his plays which have survived are—to say the least—not likely to have been either the worst or least representative of his genius, and at any rate we have a far larger proportion of his original work than in the case of either Æschylus or Sophocles. Moreover, the extant plays cover the last thirty years of the poet's life. He was born about 480 B.C. and died about 407–6 B.C. Until the age of sixty he would be liable to military service and, although he does not seem to have taken quite such a vigorous part in active life as, say, Æschylus did, yet he was an Athenian and must—as indeed from chance references we know that he did—have taken the usual Athenian's share of public service. Consequently his literary work must have been more plentiful in the latter half of his life, and naturally his genius was then at its maturity. So that it is not unreasonable to use a range of tragedies extending from 438 to 406 B.C. as illustrative of his maturest thought.[1]

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[1] *History of Greek Literature*, vol. i., p. 324.

[2] Especially in reference to Euripides' supposed attack upon women. Innumerable fragments contain very hard sayings about women, but as we cannot know the context in which they were said, it would be rash to take them—as is commonly done—to indicate that Euripides was a misogynist.

Granted then that we are to confine our attention to the extant tragedies, how are we to proceed? Surely by taking *advantage* of the fact that our author is a dramatist, which is to say, an artist. As I have stated elsewhere[2]: "We may take as the personal views of Euripides any remarks by a *dramatis persona* with whose attitude he has succeeded in making us sympathise. . . . Every work of art is designed as a whole; any 'message' which it may contain, any doctrine which it may strive to inculcate, will not be confined to this or that verbal expression. It will be part and parcel of the whole effect which the artist attempts by his work to produce upon the reader. If this or that play of Euripides has any effect upon us when we read it, inclines our sympathies either to this side or that, then we may take it that Euripides was enough of an artist to have intended that effect; and sentiments which are conducive to that effect, *no matter by what 'dramatis persona' they may happen to be expressed*, may rightly be taken as sentiments expressing the personal views of Euripides." There is no need, with Mahaffy, to allot special significance to a soliloquy, or to the first strophe or antistrophe of a chorus, so long as we are careful to follow, in dealing with the extant tragedies, those very principles which have induced us to confine our attention to them—to the comparative neglect of the fragments—i.e. we must always consider the context. In fact we must follow the ordinary lines of all literary criticism. Difficulties arise only when critics take things out of the setting into which the artist has put them. Consider for a moment what a false impression about Sophocles—than whom no poet is more concerned to justify the ways of God to man—could be derived by taking sayings such as the following out of their context in the *Œdipus Tyrannus*:

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[1] Of the ninety-two plays which he wrote no less than seventy-six belong to this period, for we are told that the *Alcestis* (produced in 438 B.C.) was his seventeenth.

[2] *Classical Review*, 1918, p. 90.

"The old prophecies of Apollo are waning; men set them out of court and nowhere is Apollo held in honour. The worship of the gods is vanishing" (906–10).

Before the *dénouement* of the play Jocasta actually gives expression to sentiments which, taken out of their context, would make Sophocles rival Euripides in his hatred of soothsayers:

"Listen to me," she says (708–9), "and know in your heart that naught of mortal birth can share in the soothsayer's art."

Similarly with Euripides, if we take a single line, such as the notorious:

> My tongue has sworn; my soul is not constrained;
> (*Hipp.* 612.)

in isolation, out of its context in the play, we commit an act of childish fatuity, of which few modern critics are indeed now capable. But they are capable of doing something which is only less flagrantly childish. They are capable of taking the excited outburst of the chorus in the *Bacchæ*,[1] when Pentheus is just falling into the trap which Dionysus has set for him, or the conventional remark of a messenger in the *Heracleidæ* [2] as indicating that Euripides himself thought revenge one of the finest things in life.[3] It should not be difficult to avoid errors of this nature; but we must go farther. We must be careful to give the right interpretation, the right tone, as it were, even to those remarks which—upon the principle we have propounded—we feel can be taken as representing the poet's own views. Thus it would be wrong to conclude from the disparaging comment of Hippolytus, in the play of that name, about tyranny:

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[1] What is wisdom, if not this?
What can gods give of greater bliss
To men, than when in hostile rows
They hold the conquering hand o'er foes? (877–80.)

[2] Instead of prospering
'Tis very good to see a foe brought low. (939–40.)

[3] So Haigh (*Tragic Drama of the Greeks*, p. 278) writes: "No trace is to be found in his writings of the Socratic doctrine that it is wrong to do evil to any man. On the contrary, he regards vengeance as 'the fairest prize that the gods can bestow upon mankind.' Nothing in his eyes, is sweeter than 'to see your enemy's happiness brought low.'"

> Think'st that to reign is pleasure for the wise?
> Ah no! unless his wits be quite destroyed,
> Whoe'er of mortals thinks there's joy in power.
> (1013–15.)

that Euripides was a sound democrat, with the proper democratic hatred of tyranny, for in their context of feeling they are but an indication of the temperate nature, of the moderation of the passions of Hippolytus; in spite of his terrible position he has sufficient insight into the value of things to be able to see the vanity of the joys of tyranny. In other words, the reference is moral rather than political.[1] Similarly, the remark of Eteocles in the *Phœnissæ*:

> If wrong must be, then wrong for kingdom's sake
> Is best—though piety in all else is well. (524–5.)

is to be taken as an indication of the character of Eteocles, and not as exempting tyranny from the ordinary categories of our moral judgments; and the tirade against women in the *Andromache* (943–53) is to be taken, in its context, as the outbreak of a jealous woman enraged at the miscarriage of her revenge, and not as the expression of what Euripides thought of woman in general. In fact, drama being what it is, it is quite true to say that any remark made by Hermione in this play is *ipso facto* discredited. So far is the dramatic form of an artist's work from making it difficult to arrive at his personal views, that it actually provides no little help to those who remember that a play is a dramatic unity and presents within small compass a complete view of life. When Iphigenia, for example, has to face death in order to save the Greek host at Aulis, she is at first appalled and exclaims:

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[1] The point is, of course, not invalidated by the fact that we know, from many other passages of a political content, that Euripides, like other good Athenians, hated tyrants.

> Sweet is the light for men to look upon;
> Beneath is nothing. Mad is he who joys
> To die. Better ill life than glorious death.
> (*Iph. A.* 1250–2.)

But the play does not end here, and we shall not take the remark, *Better ill life than glorious death*—a remark which cannot be paralleled by a single further passage in the extant plays of Euripides—as indicative of the poet's own opinion. We shall wait until the *dénouement*, and shall hear Iphigenia herself speak in a very different strain:

> I am resolved to die. A glorious death I crave.
> Away unworthy thoughts! None but the noble save!
> Come hither, mother, and consider here how well I say.
> The whole of mighty Greece now looks to me. This day
> Through me gives sailing to her fleet, and doom to Troy;
> It frees us from the fear of foreign rape, brings joy
> To wives in future, great happiness to him who marries,
> When once the penalty is paid for that rape of Paris.
> All this in dying shall I accomplish, and my renown,
> As having brought Greece freedom, shall be a glorious crown.
> Nor must I, loving life, like coward flee the fight;
> For Greece thou bearest me, not for thy sole delight.
> (1375–86.)

But we must leave the reader to judge for himself, after the perusal of this book, as to our success or otherwise in elucidating the views of the poet himself.

# EURIPIDES THE IDEALIST

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## CHAPTER I

### ANCIENT CRITICISMS OF EURIPIDES

If we wish rightly to understand what Euripides means to us to-day we cannot do better than begin by studying the criticisms upon him which have been left us by the Greeks themselves. Of course such extant criticisms form only a fragment of the criticisms which were passed upon the poet by his contemporaries and by later Greeks. Euripides was never popular during his own lifetime, and we know that the challenge of his writings provoked a good deal of hostile criticism, which has not been handed down to us. But the extant criticisms, by the comic poet Aristophanes and the staid philosopher Aristotle respectively, tell us a good deal. These two criticisms are very different from one another, especially in form. That of Aristophanes is more or less complete in itself; it represents Euripides as the butt of the comic stage, and we shall take it too seriously only at the risk of seeming to lack a sense of humour. The criticism of Aristotle, on the other hand, is very fragmentary, and from it we can only infer what he thought about Euripides, very much in the same way as a modern archæologist infers something about ancient life or customs from a fragment of stone found in his excavations. Just as, when

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we come to Aristophanes, we shall remember that he was a comic poet, whose satire and buffoonery were primarily intended to make people laugh, so in dealing with Aristotle we must make considerable allowances owing to the very fragmentary nature of his criticism.

## The Criticism of Aristotle

Roughly speaking, it may be said that Aristotle found Euripides a bad *artist*, just as Aristophanes found him a bad *man*. His criticism is aesthetic, not moral, but it does not amount to what we should now call literary criticism. It is contained in a treatise entitled *The Poetics*, the primary object of which was to make an abstract analysis of what goes to make an ideal tragedy. Concrete illustrations, from the plays of Euripides and the other tragedians, are introduced only in so far as they serve to elucidate the philosophical argument. We must not, therefore, expect to find any detailed criticism of Euripides, such as would be contained in a monograph dealing with the poet, and, remembering the fragmentary nature of the evidence with which we are dealing, we must be slow to jump to conclusions. Aristotle only mentions Euripides, or anyone else, in order to illustrate a point in his own analysis of the details of a tragedy, and consequently the references are tantalisingly brief, few, and far between. But it is possible from a careful examination of these references to form some opinion of how Euripides appealed to Aristotle. That he interested him very much is sufficiently apparent from the fact that the number of references in the *Poetics* to Euripides is greater than the number to either Æschylus or Sophocles. But a further caution is also needed. Not only must we bear in mind the fragmentary and, as it were, accidental nature of the data upon which we are attempting to form an opinion, but we must also be very critical of the context of these references. For of these accidental references two at least are ambiguous, and probably do not admit of the common interpretation. Let us consider these two first. One is the well-known passage in which Aristotle describes Euripides as "most tragic of the poets." [1] He has just been saying that the change of fortune, essential to tragedy, should be from good to bad rather than *vice versa*, and thus proceeds:

> So they are wrong who blame Euripides on the ground that many of his plays have unhappy endings. This, as we have seen, is as it should be. And we can see this from the fact that such plays, when well done, seem the most tragic on the stage and in the competitions, and Euripides, faulty as his structure undoubtedly is in other respects, yet seems the most tragic of poets.

This amounts to a stricture upon Euripides for faulty treatment of plot generally — of which anon — but praises him for his preference of the change from good fortune to bad, in virtue of which, and in reference to which alone, he is pronounced most tragic of the poets. If we stress the words *on the stage and in the competitions*, it may be that we ought to confine Aristotle's remark to the effect created by the scenic representation of a Euripidean tragedy, but in any case we are not entitled to wrench the remark from its context and to pretend that Aristotle called Euripides the most tragic of poets generally.

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[1] *Poetics*, 1453a, 30.

The second ambiguous passage is that in which Aristotle reports Sophocles as saying that he represented men as they ought to be, while Euripides represented them as they actually are (*ibid.* 1460b, 35). Does this mean that Sophocles represented men as they ought to be represented, or as they ought to live? We need not decide the point, because for our present purpose the passage is not evidence at all. Aristotle quotes it merely as an illustration of a technical means of overcoming an objector's argument in a discussion and not as his own criticism of either Euripides or Sophocles. He takes no responsibility for the content of the remark, which we may therefore ignore.

References such as these do little to forward the argument, but we are anxious to consider all the passages of the *Poetics*, in which any mention of Euripides is made, in order that the reader may be in the position of an impartial judge. There is a mention of him, for example, at 1455a, 16, but it is only in discussing what is technically called a "recognition"—the device in Greek tragedy by which one of the protagonists convinces another of his or her identity—where the recognition of Iphigenia by Orestes is praised as the best type of that device. With this exception all the remaining references to Euripides in the *Poetics* fall under one of the following three heads—the treatment of the Chorus, the character-drawing, and the structure of the plots. We will consider them in this order.

### (*a*) *The Chorus in Euripides*

In the development of Greek tragedy there was a marked tendency, noticed by Horace (*Ars Poetica*, 193), for the Chorus to assume a less and less intimate connection with the main plot of the drama; and it is in this connection that Aristotle criticises the Euripidean Chorus. His words must be carefully noted. They are:

> One should regard the Chorus as one of the actors; it should be a part of the whole, and share in the action of the play after the style of Sophocles, not of Euripides. In later poets the choral songs no more belong to any particular story than to any other tragedy. Wherefore they are sung as interludes—a practice which was begun by Agathon. (1456a, 25–30.)

Here are two distinct statements: (1) We should regard the Chorus as one of the actors, and it should share in the action as it does with Sophocles and not with Euripides. (2) Later poets neglected this precept and, *beginning with Agathon,* introduced irrelevant interludes into their plays. To anyone familiar with Greek tragedy the first of these two statements is little short of astounding. For neither in Æschylus nor in Sophocles does the Chorus take such a prominent part in the action as it does in the hands of Euripides. In one play—the *Suppliants*—the Chorus is practically a protagonist. So astounding does Aristotle's remark seem that at least one Greek scholar has been driven to the drastic expedient of emending the text in order to make him intelligible. A very slight change would make the text read: "in the manner of Sophocles or of Euripides." But, whatever may be thought of this, the words of Aristotle afford no justification for the frequent description, among the critics, of the *stasima* of Euripides as irrelevant interludes. The introduction of these is clearly assigned by Aristotle to Agathon, not to Euripides. The connection of thought between the choral songs and the action of the play is often more subtle in Euripides than in either Æschylus or Sophocles—many legends must have had intimate associations for the mind of the poet, and to his audience, which are quite unknown to us—but it does exist, as scholars have conclusively shown.[1] However unintelligible Aristotle's first remark may be, he says nothing to support those critics who have accused Euripides of irrelevancy in his choral odes. Let us see what he has to say about the second of our three headings.

### (*b*) *Character-drawing*

There are indications in the *Poetics* from which we might, somewhat rashly, conclude that Aristotle held Euripides to be deficient in this respect, both in the sense of representing needlessly bad characters and in the artistic sense of failing to depict a character convincingly. In the first sense he mentions the case of Menelaus in the *Orestes* (1454a, 29 and 1461b, 22). Now such a criticism is evidence of the close connection between art and morality in the minds of the ancients. It is of a piece with Plato's strictures upon poets and upon music in his *Republic*; and it is a result of Aristotle's fundamental proposition that the characters of a tragedy must be morally good (*ibid.* 1454a, 16). But this is a point upon which modern ideas, largely as a result of the less intimate connection of the stage with the life of to-day than was the case with the city-state as known to Aristotle, are not entirely in agreement with the philosopher's presuppositions.[1] And Euripides, most modern of ancient dramatists,[2] would probably have disputed these presuppositions. Moreover, there are particular reasons which must have influenced Euripides in his portrayal of the character to which Aristotle takes exception. Menelaus was a Spartan, and Sparta, besides being the national enemy, was the representative of a cultureless ideal, and as such was thoroughly hated by Euripides.[3]

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[1] The curious may consult Decharme, *Euripides and the Spirit of his Dramas* (English translation by Loeb), pp. 288 ff.; A. E. Phoutrides in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. xxvii., pp. 77–170; Dr. Verrall, *Four Plays of Euripides*, pp. 64–5; J. T. Sheppard in the *Classical Review*, December 1918.

Of the more strictly artistic fault, of failing to depict a character convincingly, Aristotle instances the Iphigenia in Aulis, remarking that her weakness at first is inconsistent with her subsequent courage—a piece of remarkably shallow literary criticism. It is true that Iphigenia first supplicates for her life—how else could the poet have made his audience realise the terrors of her situation?—and subsequently consents to die, but this involves no inconsistent *change* of character. It is a mere piece and, I submit, a very fine piece, of dramatic *development* of character, whereby we see a fine, but very human, character overcome her natural, human, frailty and rise to superhuman heights of courage and devotion in what she conceives to be the service of her country. This Iphigenia, so far from being a badly drawn character, really shows a wonderful insight on the part of Euripides into the psychology of woman. Every human soul, and especially every woman's soul, contains within itself possibilities of devotion and self-sacrifice which are undreamt of until some terrible situation brings them out. There is no need to insist upon this for modern ears,[1] but it no doubt seemed very strange to Aristotle with his clear-cut conception of things. He could appreciate the columnar Antigone of Sophocles, and also the weaker Ismene, but he would probably have been surprised to be told that there is the making of an Antigone in every Ismene. Moreover, we must remember the fragmentary and accidental nature of his criticism. He has just been laying down the indisputable general rule that the characters in tragedy must be consistent, and he adds as an example of inconsistency what *prima facie* may appear a very obvious example, especially to the cast-iron mind of an Aristotle; but the remark is made almost in a parenthesis, and it would be unfair to press it as evidence of his considered judgment.

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[1] See Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, p. 293.

[2] See pp. xi, 10, 38, 102, etc.

[3] In addition to the Menelaus of the *Orestes*, witness the odious characters of Menelaus and Hermione in the *Andromache* and especially the outburst at ll. 445 ff. Compare also *Suppliants*, 187.

Although Aristotle did not write a general critique upon Euripides, it is reasonable to conclude that, had he done so, his verdict would by no means have been what we might have expected from the fragmentary and accidental allusions of the *Poetics*. It is the business of this monograph to try to make this clear. The first point to notice is that a detailed study of the extant plays does not support his parenthetical strictures. For example, the student of the *Poetics* may well be astonished, in reading Euripides, to note that fine sense of characterisation which induces the poet to portray good traits even in an odious character, as he does when he endows Clytemnestra with a sense of tender pity for the lowly condition of her outcast daughter, Electra. This Lady Macbeth of a woman has had the heart to help her paramour to murder her husband, but Euripides gives her a share in the "milk of human kindness." This is how she addresses her daughter:

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[1] Notice again the note of modernism in Euripides.

> O child, thy nature is to love thy sire
> Alway. 'Tis so. Some are children of their sires,
> Some love the mother more. I pardon thee.
> For, child, I take not over-joy in deeds
> I've done. But why art thou unwashed, unkempt,
> Now that thy travail pangs of birth are o'er?
> O wretched that I am for my designs!
> How more than right I drove my spouse to wrath!
> (*Electra*, 1102–10.)

But the best illustration both of Euripides' skill in portraying a character and of his interest in character-study is to be found in the *Andromache*.[1] I refer to the character of Hermione, which, except for the remorse of Orestes and Electra, after the slaying of Clytemnestra—also, be it noted, a Euripidean passage—is a unique representation in Greek literature of repentance. Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, had taken Andromache, formerly the wife of Hector, as his concubine, by whom he had a son, whereas Hermione, his lawful wife, was barren; and Euripides has drawn in her a remarkably modern study of a jealous woman. First of all she attempts, during the absence of her husband at Delphi, to revenge herself upon Andromache—in which she is aided by her father, Menelaus—by killing the woman along with her little son. The plot is frustrated by Peleus; and Hermione suddenly changes from the heights of a passionate jealousy to the depths of despair and remorse. At first sight the reader might think this but baffled rage; but a closer study of her character proves that it is not so. Hermione is a very simple and ignorant woman, who honestly believes that Andromache has cast a spell upon her and made her husband hate her. This much is obvious right from the beginning of the play, upon Andromache's own showing, even before Hermione herself appears:

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[1] This least successful of all the tragedies of Euripides has sadly puzzled the critics. Gilbert Murray, following Nauck, thinks it is of the nature of a political tract, that it was produced at Argos as a definite piece of political propaganda to foment hatred of Sparta (*Euripides and his Age*, p. 112), and we all know that an artist is likely to achieve but poor work by prostituting his art to political or other ends. Another suggestion (*Classical Review*, May–June 1923) is that the play was meant to honour the young Molossian King Thrapys, who had been educated at Athens, and that it was produced in Molossia. But, whatever the nature of its propaganda, hatred of Sparta undoubtedly animates the play (see especially 445 ff., 595 ff. and the whole odious character of Menelaus), though this is not to be accounted for by entirely political motives. Though undoubtedly an Athenian patriot, Euripides was first of all an artist, and he must have had some more personal, more artistic motive, than is provided by political considerations, which induced him to compose a play with so unpromising a plot as that of the *Andromache*. Verrall (*Four Plays of Euripides*, pp. 1–42), who has his own perverse interpretation of the play, considers that something is presupposed to it. In fact all the critics say something different. I suggest that the artistic deficiencies of the play are to be accounted for, though not, of course, justified, by the fact that it was an artistic experiment in character-study.

> Saying that I with sweet herbs have made
> Her barren, and thereby hated of her lord.
>
> (*Androm.* 32–3.)

Upon her entry, which has nothing of queenly dignity about it, but rather the pomp and insolent pride of a small soul attempting to fill a big position, she assumes, of course, a defiant air, as becomes her station; but her one, haunting thought breaks out at once:

> With ornament of gold about my head,
> And dædal robes to deck my flesh, no gift
> From Achilles' nor from Peleus' halls, but all
> The product of Laconia, Spartan land,

Gifts which my father, Menelaus, with wealth
Of bridal tokens once did give me, here
I come, nor curb my speech through fear. And thus
I give you[1] answer. But thou,[2] who art a slave,
A woman captive of the spear, dost wish
To hold my halls, and drive me forth from them,
And by thy spells hast made my husband hate
Me, in that my womb, through thee, is lost
In barrenness. (*Androm.* 147–58.)

This thought is not made more sweet by the fact that Andromache has herself given a son to Neoptolemus:

To such a pitch of lust, unhappy one,
Art come, that with the son of him who slew
Thy lord, thou liest, and to a murd'rer's loins
Givest issue. (*Ibid.* 170–3.)

But, in order to appreciate her feelings to the full, we must realise that Hermione is the type of woman to whom a husband is everything.[3] Menelaus may be presumed to know his own daughter, and he says:

Deprived of lord, she is deprived of life;
(*Ibid.* 373.)

and she herself confesses as much in her altercation with Andromache:

*Androm.* Can'st not in silence bear thy grief of love?
*Hermione.* Why? This is chief concern of women all.
(*Ibid.* 290–1.)

She is, then, a woman with one burning passion, but otherwise weak; and this weakness is very clearly shown in her treatment of Andromache, for in that treatment we see nothing but the spitefulness of a very weak woman. She gives herself away at once in a manner which is almost pathetic in its obviousness, when she says:

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[1] The Chorus.

[2] Andromache.

[3] This explains her readiness to marry Orestes, who had once been betrothed to her, later on. The episode, so far from being a weakness in Euripides, is a crowning piece of psychology.

> Thou must, instead of holding high-born views
> Of old, cower in humble guise, and clasp
> My knees, and sweep these halls, besprinkling them
> With dew from Achelöus' stream, and know
> Thy place. There is no Hector here, no Priam,
> Nor wealth of his, but city-state of Greece.
> (*Ibid.* 164–9.)

After the miscarriage of her plot, she again shows the weakness of her character in attempting to lay the blame upon others, as only a weak woman will. But she is truly conscience-stricken, and, as the nurse announces, attempts suicide—the last resource of weakness.

> O women dear,[1] how ill succeeding ill
> To-day thereto is added. For in this house
> My mistress—'tis of Hermione I speak—
> 'Reft of her father, and conscience-stricken too,
> At her design to kill Andromache
> And her son, now wants to die herself, in fear
> Of her husband, lest she should be banishèd
> In dishonour, for her deeds, or put to death
> For slaying whom she ought not. With difficulty
> Her guardian handmaids forestall her wish to hang
> Herself, and snatch the sword and take it from
> Her hand. (*Ibid.* 802–13.)

Of course she fears her husband's return from Delphi, but this by no means invalidates the sincerity of her repentance. She is truly conscience-stricken, and quite apart from any apprehension of the results to herself of her action, she is appalled at the mere horror of it. Soon she is exclaiming:

> Alas, for the dreadful deed which I have wrought,
> Accurst am I, accurst of every man. (*Ibid.* 838–9.)

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[1] She addresses the Chorus.

Nor does she attempt to hide her fault, but confesses, when Orestes asks how her misfortunes came upon her, that she has herself to blame in the first place. Orestes asks whether gods or men have wronged her, and she replies:

> Myself has wronged myself; in part my husband
> Too; in part the gods. I'm ruined by all.
> (*Ibid.* 902–3.)

So vividly does she realise her fault, that she admits that Neoptolemus will be justified in killing her, and to her disordered imagination, struck with horror as she is at the deed attempted, the very scene of her action becomes intolerable, because cognisant of her intent. As Macbeth can apostrophise the earth:

> Thou sure and firm-set earth,
> Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
> Thy very stones prate of my whereabout;
> (Act II. Sc. i.)

so Hermione beseeches Orestes to remove her at once from the scene of her crime:

> By Zeus, the father of our race, I pray,
> Send me as far as may be from this land,
> Or to my father's halls. For that this house
> Takes voices, it seems, to drive me forth. The land
> Of Phthia hates me. (*Ibid.* 921–5.)

This is a fine piece of character-drawing which, though it does not compensate for the structural weaknesses of the *Andromache*, undoubtedly explains how so great an artist as Euripides could, by having his interest absorbed in the portraying of one fascinatingly interesting character—and that something in the way of a novelty in Greek literature—come to compose a play in which one set of characters vanishes completely from the stage before the action is half over. With this in mind we shall refuse to conclude, from Aristotle's parenthetical strictures, that he really considered Euripides to be a poor portrayer of character. Let us pass to the third heading of his criticism.

### (c) *The Structure of the Plots* [1]

Aristotle's main criticism on this head also is parenthetical. It occurs in the passage already quoted, which ends in the famous, but ambiguous, remark that Euripides is nevertheless the most tragic of poets, in the course of which he uses the expression "faulty as his structure undoubtedly is in other respects." But this is a very different kind of parenthesis from those with which we have been hitherto dealing. It is the parenthesis of concession to universal opinion, and implies that Aristotle's considered judgment was at one with that opinion. Now if this is so, there are likely to be indications of Aristotle's agreement elsewhere in the *Poetics*, and so there are. He describes a certain episode as *what the poet, but not the story, wants* (1454b, 33), or, in other words, as something unnecessary to the story, dragged in to subserve the poet's own ends. This, however, need not detain us long, for it is a very limited criticism of nothing more than the recognition of Orestes by Iphigenia; and we must not make the mistake of taking the phrase out of its context and, by giving it a wider reference than Aristotle intended, reading into it a criticism of

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[1] There could be no better illustration of the parenthetical nature of Aristotle's criticism of Euripides in the *Poetics*, than the remarkable fact that, although Aristotle emphatically singles out the "episodic" plot for special condemnation, he nowhere mentions the *Andromache* for that fault.

Euripidean plot generally. But we cannot dismiss so readily another, much more far-reaching, criticism—that of the *dénouement* of the *Medea*. Aristotle's words are: *It is obvious that the* dénouement *of the plot must result from the plot itself, and not from the "machine," as in the "Medea"* (1454b, 1), by which he means that the *dénouement* must be brought about by the plot itself, and not by any external agency. This criticism raises the whole question of the use of the so-called *deus ex machina* in ancient tragedy, and will take us a little beyond Aristotle, but we will return to him very soon.

Aristotle's conception of the use of the "machine"[1] by Euripides is an entirely false one, and has prevailed so long only because of the support which it has seemed to receive from the well-known criticism of the Roman poet Horace, who in his *Art of Poetry* (191 ff.) enunciates the maxim that a god should not interfere with the action of the play unless a complication has arisen to justify the introduction of such a vindicator.[2]

In two only of the extant tragedies of Euripides—the *Orestes* and the *Hippolytus*—is the device used, to the smallest degree, in order to untie the knot of the action, and in the *Hippolytus* it might readily have been dispensed with (from this point of view), for the nurse herself might well have revealed the truth. And when we notice how in the speech of Artemis, who appears *ex machina*, the "solemn rebukes and tender condolences are tempered by an air of serene tranquillity, so appropriate to the gods,"[1] we ought to suspect at once that the function of the *deus ex machina* was, to Euripides, by no means primarily that of an untier of knots. It seems rather to be used to produce a consummation of that purging of the emotions which Aristotle himself regarded as the function of tragedy to effect through pity and terror—a tribulation and refinement of the spirit, which Milton expressed so well when he concluded his *Samson Agonistes* with the lines:

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[1] This was a stage device by means of which a god, or hero, would appear on a platform above the heads of the actors and make an announcement, especially towards the end of a Greek tragedy.

[2] I have discussed what I take to be the meaning of this in the *Classical Review* for Feb.–March 1920. It certainly does not mean that a god should be introduced, under any circumstances, to solve the complications of a plot which has become too involved for any other solution.

> His servants he, with new acquist
> Of true experience from this great event,
> With peace and consolation hath dismiss'd,
> And calm of mind, all passion spent.

Now this fact, that Euripides used the device where the plot would have done so well without it—the *Iphigenia in Tauris* is a further example—is sufficient proof that the ordinary conception of its significance is inadequate. It is rather his way of expressing divine approval, or disapproval, of the actions of men. In the case of the *Hippolytus*, for example, the fortunes of Theseus are moralized by Artemis, *ex machina*, in the true spirit of idealism. His lack of intention acquits him to a certain degree, and so does the fact that he was deceived by Phædra. We are made to feel that his fate is but part of the tragedy of human life—in which the good are not always rewarded—and that, at any rate, the gods take no joy in the misfortunes of the righteous. Her words are:

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[1] Haigh, *Tragic Drama of the Greeks*, p. 247.

As for thy fault,
First thy ignorance absolves thee; then
Thy wife in dying removed all proof, and so
Persuaded thee, whom now these evils most
Afflict—a grief to me. No joy we take
When the righteous die, but evil men we whelm
With all their home and children in dire ruin.
(*Hipp.* 1334–41.)

And her final injunction to father and son is:

But thou, O son of ancient Ægeus, take
Thy child within thine arms, and clasp him so.
Unwilling didst thou slay him; and for men
To err when heaven decrees is nothing strange.
And thee, Hippolytus, I bid, hate not
Thy sire. Thy fate it was to perish thus.
(*Ibid.* 1431–6.)

Here surely we have no untying of a knot, but rather the instilling of just that "calm of mind" which it is the function of tragedy to produce. Let the reader examine for himself the effect of a divine epiphany in other plays. In the *Electra*, for example, the apparition of the Dioscuri[1] produces, and is intended by Euripides to produce, a moral satisfaction and peacefulness, to which, we are made to feel, the protagonists of the play have succeeded in winning their way through "life's fitful fever." They are ministers of good, who say:

But we upon Sicilian waves
  Must swoop, to save all sailor-men,
And prows of ships, from watery graves,
  Making our way through paths of heaven,
To bring no help to wicked souls,
  But all for whom the just and right
Is dear in life, out of the holes
  Of trouble and of sorry plight
To lift and save. So e'er be loth
  To sin, or enter ship with man
Who once has falsely broken troth.
  A god I am, who speak this ban. (1347–56.)

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[1] Sons of Zeus, i.e. Castor and Pollux.

As often as not the god, or goddess, will begin by praising the peculiarly Greek virtue of moderation, or giving a divine sanction to the wonderful wisdom of such maxims as *Know thyself* or *Nothing in excess*, as indeed Thetis does to Peleus at the end of the *Andromache*:

> And first I warn thee—be not o'erwrought
> At these sad troubles that do hem thee round; (1233-4.)

ending with the reminder that, after all, man is mortal:

> Cease then from grief for those who've died, for know
> That for all mortal men the die is cast
> By heaven, and for them 'tis right they die. (1270-2.)

With passages such as these in mind we cannot fail to see that the conventional idea of what the "machine" meant to Euripides is not only inadequate but also fundamentally false.[1] Whatever our religious opinions, we are all conscious that life, as we know it, is a drama played in the face of unknown, or, at least, but imperfectly comprehended, forces; it is surrounded on all sides by an uncharted fringe.[1] We thrust out our barque into it from time to time, but the conditions are such that no man-made boat can sail that sea; the wind may waft us messages from it ever and anon, but they are diffused hither and thither before they reach us, for we can install no wireless there, so that we gather but fragments, which —try as we will—we cannot piece into an intelligible whole. Then, sooner or later, death descends like a curtain, and we ourselves know no more. But when it descends upon our friends, we are left here, to think and to meditate, upon the hither side of the uncharted. We can see the protagonists of the human drama brought right up to this "fringe," and the spectacle endows their lives with a solemnity which we feel, but cannot explain. What happens beyond cannot alter what they did in life, only their passing from it seems to complete its significance, to endow it with an eternal value, and, as it were, to make it immortal. Hence the paradox of why the tragic ending of a novel or play is so much more satisfying to our human feelings than the "happy" ending, whereby the protagonists are left to "live happily ever after." There is a solemnity and completeness about it which cannot be destroyed by any of the trivial accidents of human life.

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[1] Dr. Verrall, for example (*Euripides the Rationalist*, pp. 174-5), assumes that if Euripides used the "machine" seriously, then he believed in anthropomorphism. Writing of the *Iphigenia in Tauris* he thinks it inconsistent to scoff at one who took Orestes and Pylades for the Dioscuri, and then to have a divine apparition of them later on in the same play. The argument, of course, holds good only on his own interpretation (the commonly accepted one) of Euripides' use of the "machine," and implies that there is no difference between the apparition of the Dioscuri on the earth and *ex machina*. But there is a very great difference. A seriously intended representation of their apparition on earth would imply a belief in anthropomorphism, but no such belief is involved in their apparition *ex machina*. So we are by no means forced to conclude, as Verrall does, that such apparitions cannot be intended to be taken seriously. To be taken *literally*, of course, they are not; but *seriously* is a very different matter. Some of the most serious things in life can scarcely be given "a local habitation and a name," but for the purpose of scenic representation some attempt must be made to do so, and this attempt Euripides makes with his "machine."

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[1] Compare Murray, *Four Stages of Greek Religion*, p. 152: "The uncharted surrounds us on every side, and we must needs have some relation towards it, a relation which will depend on the general discipline of a man's mind and the bias of his whole character. As far as knowledge and conscious reason will go, we should follow resolutely their austere guidance. When they cease, as cease they must, we must use as best we can those fainter powers of apprehension and surmise and sensitiveness by which, after all, most high truth has been reached as well as most high art and poetry."

Now the ordinary *dramatis personæ* of a Euripidean tragedy are these protagonists in a drama of human life. The *deus ex machina* is not a human protagonist, but an incorporeal spirit of surmise, of hope or faith, in form a messenger from the uncharted, but in reality no more than a projection of our own, to which faith or hope alone is emboldened to give the sanction of divinity, of a messenger from some region beyond the scope of our explored experience.

We can now return to Aristotle and his criticism of the ending of the *Medea*. We remark at once that it would have made no difference to the play had Medea been killed by Jason, for, as it is, by ascending in the chariot of the sun, she vanishes completely from the scene of human drama, and is caught up by the "machine" into the sphere of the uncharted, just as much as she would have been by death. In a modern novel on the same theme, she would, no doubt, have been killed, and the reader left to ponder her wrongs. In the hands of Euripides she is allowed to point these out for herself with all the sanction and finality that belong to the "machine." But there is no untying of a knot; so we must simply admit that Aristotle, after enunciating an unexceptionable principle—*It is obvious that the* dénouement *of the plot must result from the plot itself*—adds as an example of its violation what, properly understood, is no violation at all, but rather an example of what Aristotle himself admitted, though in a sense, perhaps, rather different from that which he meant by the words, to belong legitimately to the "machine," as being outside the sphere of human knowledge—*what it is impossible for man to know.*[1]

So much, then, for the actual examples mentioned by Aristotle in the *Poetics* to support his parenthetical charge of faulty structure. They do not amount to much. But may it not be that Aristotle considered the fact to be so generally admitted that he never thought of instancing examples to support it? This must be admitted to be possible; and so we must leave the *Poetics* for a moment, and consider the extant plays of Euripides, to see if we can discover what might be regarded as faulty structure.

We have not far to look. The case of the *Andromache* has already been mentioned, and another equally patent example of a play which, at first sight, seems to consist of two loosely connected halves is afforded by the *Hecuba*. The first part of this play deals with the fate of Polyxena, who is sacrificed by the Greeks to appease the shade of Achilles, and it ends with her death. The second part is concerned with the vengeance of Hecuba upon Polymestor, who has treacherously slain her son Polydorus; and the two parts seem held together by the purely external accident that the slave-woman, whom Hecuba had ordered to fetch salt water for the last ablutions of Polyxena, happened to find the dead body of Polydorus floating in the sea. But, when we look closer, we see that there is a very strong internal connection in the character of Hecuba. She is the central figure throughout, and the unity of the drama lies in the fact that it is a study in the

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[1] So *Poetics*, 1454b, 3: "But one must use the machine for what lies outside the drama, either for previous events or for what it is impossible for man to know, or for later events which need explaining and announcing."

*cumulative* effect of great sorrows upon a mother's feelings. Euripides was interested in psychology, as the study of Hermione proves, in a sense in which neither Æschylus nor Sophocles was; and it is a well-known psychological fact that the effect of blow upon blow of misfortune is very different from the effect of the first blow. Observe how this works in the case of Hecuba. When she knows the fate of Polyxena she is simply prostrated with grief, so that when Talthybius arrives with the report of the sacrifice, he finds her writhing on the ground completely enveloped in her cloak. He asks the Chorus where he can find Hecuba, and they reply:

> This is she right near at hand; she lies,
> Talthybius, enwrapped in cloak upon the ground.
> (*Hec.* 486–7.)

All that she desires is to be left undisturbed in her grief:

> Alas! and who art thou that lettest not
> My body lie? Whosoe'er thou art, respect
> My grief; (*Ibid.* 501–3.)

or sacrificed along with her daughter:

> O friend, art here because the Greeks decreed
> Me too to slaughter on the tomb? How gladly
> Would I hear it! Let us haste, old man, lead on!
> (*Ibid.* 505–7.)

But, when Talthybius has announced how nobly Polyxena met her death, the mother pulls herself together, and is so impressed by her daughter's nobility that she can find in it much to assuage the acutest pangs of her grief:

> And now I cannot from my mind erase
> Thy sorrow, so as not to wail. And yet
> The acutest sting hast thou removed, announced
> So nobly to me. (*Ibid.* 589–92.)

She has no thought of vengeance, but resigns herself, amidst heart-felt sorrow, to do what little she can by the loving performance of the last obsequies due to the dead:

> But, ancient handmaid, take up this pitcher here
> And bear, and dip it in the sea, and bring
> The last ablutions of my child, the bride
> That is no bride, the maid a maid no more,
> That I may wash and lay her out; not duly,
> For I cannot, but as I may. Oh dear!
> To deck her, something from the slaves I'll take
> Who dwell with me within these tents, if aught
> Has been preserved by anyone, and stol'n—
> Spite of new masters—forth from ancient home.
> (*Ibid.* 609–18.)

But when the handmaid returns with news of the murder of Polydorus, Hecuba is a different woman. Her first words are the outbreak of a woman distraught by grief to a fiendish rage:

> Alas! alas! I see my son,
> Dead Polydorus, whom a Thracian man
> Was guarding for me. I am undone,
> O wretched me! O life so wan!
> A woeful strain of yearning
> Thus I pour,
> For him, alas! new-learning
> Trouble sore
> From villainous man. (*Ibid.* 681–7.)

and resignation is hers no longer:

> Unthinkable! unthinkable! I have to bear
> New evils born.
> Never without its groan, without its tear
> The day shall dawn. (*Ibid.* 689–92.)

She thinks immediately of action, and seizes upon the opportune arrival of Agamemnon as a means to her end. To him, then, Greek though he be, she turns for help in the vengeance which she is unable to work out unaided:

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Without his help, in naught can I avail
To 'venge my children. Then why hesitate?
Succeed or not, assay I must. Be brave!
Agamemnon, by thy knees and beard I pray,
And by thy prosperous hand, list now to me.
(*Ibid.* 749–53.)

She throws herself entirely into his hands, and easily prevails upon him by her impassioned description of the treachery of Polymestor:

Who with no fear of heaven, nor of gods
Below the earth, has done a deed most foul;
He whom full oft in hospitality
At my board I set as honoured guest, and gave
All that was right to give, has slain my son,
And slaying him no burial gave, but cast
To welter in the sea. (*Ibid.* 791–7.)

A plot is devised which is to lead to the death of Polymestor without compromising Agamemnon with the army. Hecuba entices him within her tent, where an ambush is laid: his children are killed and he himself blinded, whereupon Hecuba breaks forth exultingly to the Chorus:

Soon shalt thou see him come before the tents
Blind, and blindly with unsteady feet
Reel here and there, and his two babes whom I
With noble Trojan-women slew. I have
Requited him. Look now, forth from the tent
He comes. I will depart and fly his wrath
Which boils within his Thracian soul most fierce.
(*Ibid.* 1049–55.)

A very different woman surely from the Hecuba whom the death of Polyxena left writhing in an agony of despair upon the ground! And in this development of sorrow lies a very real unity of the play; so that we cannot take the *Hecuba* as an instance of the faulty structure mentioned by Aristotle, though we must admit that it has a unity of character rather than of action. If we demand unity of action, Aristotle's stricture is justified—but Euripides is to be pardoned if, in his new interest in the unity of character, he has at times neglected strictly to observe all the rules of the old precept of unity of action.[1]

## The Criticism of Aristophanes

It is possible to take the attacks of a comic poet too seriously, and we have already mentioned the need of caution in dealing with the criticism of Aristophanes. He who would make a just appraisement of this criticism has to steer his way between two opposite dangers, between the fault of taking too seriously some isolated criticism—made much of, perhaps, by Aristophanes just because it afforded such admirable scope for ridicule—between that fault on the one hand, and, on the other, the equally grave fault of failing to recognise, and to discount, the cumulative effect of such ridicule by producing in the reader an unconscious bias against the writer at whom it is levelled. I think there is no disputing the fact that the comparative unpopularity of Euripides, until recent years, has been due, to a degree greater than is usually recognised, to some such unconscious bias occasioned by the ridicule of Aristophanes. Moreover, there are peculiar reasons for assigning more weight to his attack than we would to the attack of any other comic writer. He was, among other things, a serious politician, who had what he considered to be the good of his country very much at heart. He felt towards Euripides very much the same sort of feeling which we can imagine a Tory of the old school entertaining towards a modern Socialist. Neither he nor Euripides may be wholly right, or wholly wrong, but something of the truth is likely to emerge from an examination of their conflicting views. So we shall take up the chief counts in Aristophanes' indictment of Euripides—dealing with some of them in this chapter, and using others merely as pegs upon which to hang parts of our own exposition in later chapters—not so much for their own significance, as because they help to elucidate the truth.

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[1] Haigh (*Tragic Drama of the Greeks*, p. 243) says: "The same criticism (that of being episodic) also applies to plays like the *Hecuba* and the *Andromache*, in which the action is divided into two successive portions, unconnected with one another except by the fact that the same person is concerned in both of them—a superficial kind of link which fails to give artistic unity to the piece." But I contend that the link is by no means so superficial as he would make out.

There are many disparaging references to Euripides in several of the comedies of Aristophanes, but in one in particular—the *Frogs* [1]—which represents Euripides and Æschylus contending in rivalry before Dicæopolis in the under-world for the title of chief tragic poet, is there constant criticism of Euripides. Although the whole scene is burlesque—they recite, for example, into opposite pans of a huge pair of scales, in order to determine which of the two wrote the weightier lines—it yet contains many acute remarks. Many criticisms are æsthetic, or artistic, at least in form. Such are the ridicule poured upon the monotonous cæsura in his verses, the delightful parody (1331 ff.) of a Euripidean monody, wherein a woman has fallen asleep over her spinning and dreams that her neighbour Glyce has robbed her hen-roost. But even the æsthetic criticisms spring from a certain *moral* feeling. In this parody, for example, the technical idiosyncrasies which are satirised—such as the jingling repetitions, the looseness of the metre or the florid character of the music—are really satirised as being inconsistent with the seriousness of tragedy, much in the same way as Plato's criticism both of poetry and of music in the *Republic* is based on moral rather than on æsthetic grounds. A moralist is never a good art critic—even Plato is no exception—and there is in this attack no more than the usual unenlightened opposition of old-fashioned folk to all innovation in art.[1] The whole parody is as clever as, but to be taken no more seriously than, Calverley's parodies of impressionistic poetry, such as:

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[1] So called because the Chorus were dressed as frogs—those, presumably, which inhabited the marshes of the under-world, where the contest between Euripides and Æschylus takes place.

And the glittering shout
Of the wolf rings out—
  Tu-whit, tu-whit, tu-whoo.

There is in the *Knights* (l. 18) a disparaging reference to the dialogue-style of Euripides, but against this must be put Aristophanes' own admission that he had learnt much from it himself:

I use the rolling periods of his style,

he says in one of the extant fragments, when speaking of Euripides, though he immediately adds that his thoughts are not so commonplace:

But make my thoughts less vulgar than he does.

This recalls his criticism of the subject-matter of Euripides as being commonplace rather than ideal. He accuses him of lowering the tone of tragedy by

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[1] Cf. in music the old opposition to Wagner.

> Representing common things, with which we live
> And which we use

—a criticism with which we shall have to deal at greater length in our third chapter.[1] But Aristophanes' real criticisms of Euripides are not even formally æsthetic. They are fundamentally *moral* objections, which taken together amount to a terrible indictment —that he represented base characters on the stage, lowered the dignity of tragedy, was a slanderer of womankind, the corrupter of Athenian life, and, finally, was himself a sophist. Some of these charges are not worthy of being treated more seriously than as pegs upon which to hang different parts of our own exposition of Euripides,[2] but the slander will be incidentally refuted as we take up these different aspects of his work. In this chapter we will deal only with the last two counts of the indictment—that he was the corrupter of Athenian life[3] and was himself a sophist.[4] Now Socrates, whom we all respect, was accused by Meletus on exactly these grounds, but his fair name has been gloriously vindicated by his pupil Plato in the dialogue called the *Apology of Socrates*. The Athenians, it is true, believed Meletus, and put Socrates to death, but they were wrong in doing so.[1] Now it is one of the strangest facts in literary history, that credence should have been given to Aristophanes' attack upon Euripides, while little or none is given to the attack upon Socrates in the *Clouds*.[2] Moreover we have other evidence—besides that given by Aristophanes—against Socrates. We have, for example, the explicit testimony of Plato for the fact that Socrates was not popular with his contemporaries and gained the opprobrious name of Sophist.[1] Socrates himself put it down to his unfortunate habit of exposing the ignorance of the pretentious, but it was only a particular instance of the general disrepute in which all intellectual inquiry has always been held by religious conservatism. An unenlightened age never suffers from any lack of weapons to turn against its more enlightened members. Now Aristophanes was the champion of the old *régime*, of the dear old "Fighters at Marathon"[2]—as he calls them—who looked askance upon the new learning, and herein lies the real explanation of his attack alike upon Socrates and upon Euripides. In the *Frogs* he represents Æschylus sitting in the under-world in undisputed possession of the throne of tragedy, before the arrival of the new-comer:

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[1] For the present let us add to our mental reservation about it the fact that Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* (III. ii. 5) actually praises Euripides for being the first to produce a poetical illusion by borrowing his expressions from ordinary language. "The delusion is well produced," he says, "if a writer takes his phrases from everyday speech, as Euripides does, thereby making an innovation."

[2] In addition to chapter iii. (just referred to) see that on "His Defence of Women" for a refutation of the first and third of the above charges. Notice again the confusion of æsthetic and moral goodness which is implicit in these charges. Aristophanes makes the same mistake as Aristotle did in his remarks about Menelaus being an example of unnecessary villainy.

[3] Adequately to judge this point the reader is asked to wait until he has read the chapter on "Internal and External Standards of Morality."

[4] The Greek word originally meant a *wise man*, but owing to the rise of professional "Sophists," who took money for their teaching—a practice which was repugnant to Greek ideas—and trained their pupils to gain a rhetorical victory in argument without consideration of the truth or otherwise of their contentions, the word came to have the sinister connotation which it bears to-day.

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[1] Political intrigue probably accounted for the condemnation. Suspicion would be aroused, amid hot partisans, by the abstinence of Socrates from any share of public life.

[2] Scholars are at pains to explain this. Verrall, for example (*Euripides the Rationalist*, p. 106), urges us to accept the caricature of Euripides as "not wholly unfounded," although we reject that of Socrates. His arguments are a remarkable illustration of the ease with which an *a priori* theory can lead the acutest of thinkers astray. He says "it should be noted that there is a broad difference, in point of utility as biographical evidence, between such a portrait as the Euripides of the *Frogs*, and such a portrait as the Socrates of the *Clouds*. It is possible that *twenty years before Socrates' death* not many persons were as yet seriously interested in him. The *Frogs* was produced immediately after Euripides had closed a long career of theatrical fame in pathetic circumstances and amid public mourning. Under these conditions a baseless representation would have been suicidal." To which I submit (1) that a popular comedian was unlikely to caricature anyone in whom "not many persons were as yet seriously interested"; (2) that twenty years before his death Socrates had reached the age of fifty and had conversed daily in the market-place with all and sundry, whereas Euripides avoided society all his life and actually—we are told—lived for some time as a recluse in a cave on the island of Salamis; (3) that the last three years of Euripides' life were spent in Macedonia, in a seclusion even farther removed from the life of Athens than was afforded by the cave on Salamis. Whether under such circumstances Socrates could be more readily misrepresented than Euripides, is a question which I leave to the decision of the reader, but it is significant that even Verrall speaks (*ibid.*, p. iii, footnote) of "the gross and undoubtedly deliberate misrepresentation of this matter (i.e. Euripides' attitude to women) by Aristophanes" in a case where the admission of such misrepresentation does not clash with his own theories.

> But when Euripides descended here,
> He made a show before the motley crowd
> Of thieves and cut-throats, robbers, burglars too,
> Who, hearing his disputes, his twists and turns,
> Praised him and called him wisest of them all.
> (*Frogs*, 771–6.)

And in the rival proposals for the welfare of the city Dionysus is made to use the same taunt in half-mocking approval of one of Euripides' suggestions:

> Well said, Palamedes, wisest of them all. (*Ibid.* 1451.)

It is, in fact, the stock epithet to apply to him, for

> None is wiser poet than is Euripides. (*Lysist.* 368.)

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[1] *Apology*, 23a: "As a result of this inquiry I incurred many hatreds of the severest and intensest nature, so that many slanders resulted from them and I received the name of Sophist."

[2] The phrase is equivalent to such a modern one as "Diehards."

That anyone should have taken the attack upon Euripides more seriously than the similar[1] attack upon Socrates is due, in part, to the fact that Euripides has had no Plato to defend him from what has been described as the "scandalous buffoonery" of Aristophanes. In order to appreciate this, contrast what we now think of Socrates with what we might have thought had Plato never written. What an unedifying picture we should have formed!—a man actually put to death by the Athenians for impiety, the corrupter of Athenian youth, a frequenter of brothels,[2] casuist,[3] bigamist,[4] cynic,[5] Sodomite,[6] of violent sexual passions and general temper[7]—could a less engaging picture possibly be imagined? Certainly we should not recognise the Socrates whom we know from Plato, and should have good grounds for believing that Aristophanes was justified in his attack. Yet such is the perversity of human nature that we regard this attack, supported as it is by other evidence, as absolutely unfounded, but give credence to the same Aristophanes when he similarly attacks a poet whom we know from other evidence to have been held in almost universal honour by the whole of antiquity! That Euripides was so regarded admits of no doubt. It is remarkable, for example, how definitely the Roman critic, Quintilian, puts him, along with Sophocles, in a higher class than Æschylus, who is said merely to have originated the art of tragedy, whereas Sophocles and

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[1] There is almost a verbal parallel between the suggested atheism of Socrates in *Clouds*, 247 ff. (cf. 1241), and that of Euripides in *Frogs*, 889 ff.

[2] Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, iii. 2.

[3] Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 894 ff.

[4] Diog. Laert. II. v. 10.

[5] *Ibid.* II. v. 16.

[6] Lucian, *Vera Historia*, ii. 19.

[7] Müller, *Frag. Hist. Græc.*, vol. ii., p. 280.

Euripides are said to have brought far greater renown to it, and it is a point of dispute as to which of the two is the better poet. Several stories have been handed down to us, which—whatever their truth—do at any rate prove that Euripides' plays were almost passionately admired after his death. Plutarch, for example, records that upon the defeat of Athens at the end of the great Peloponnesian war in 404 B.C., the Spartan general, Lysander, was deterred from the complete destruction of the city by the recital of certain lines from the *Electra* of Euripides which moved all to tears and made it seem a shameful work to destroy the city which had produced so fine a poet.[1] The same historian records that after the failure of the Athenian expedition to Sicily, many Athenians who were then taken prisoner owed their lives to their ability to recite verses of Euripides.[2] There is an extant fragment of the comic poet, Philemon,[3] which represents someone as saying that he would willingly commit suicide if he could be sure of meeting Euripides in the underworld. Sophocles sincerely mourned his rival's death and brought his actors uncrowned to the theatre; Dionysius of Syracuse bought the poet's pen and writing-tablets at a high price and dedicated them to the Muses; the last years of Euripides' life were spent in honourable retirement at the court of Archelaus of Macedon; and there is a tradition that he was employed by no less a popular favourite than Alcibiades to celebrate his Olympic victories.[4] He is also said to have served as a priest of Apollo Zoster.[5] This last is a strange honour to give to the scorner of the national religion![1] In fact both of the last two points are surprising in that Euripides was not popular during his lifetime, but, like many another, had to wait for recognition until after his death. This unpopularity during his own life was due to the fact that all the "Fighters at Marathon" would hate, because they could not understand, him. We must never forget how very different was the position occupied by a poet in ancient Athens from that aloofness from the affairs of the world which modern poets enjoy. In Athens the poet was a political factor,[2] so that he naturally comes in for all that abuse which with us is reserved for our political leaders.[3] But, apart from his lifetime, the honour with which Euripides was regarded later is sufficiently attested by the epitaph placed upon his tomb:

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[1] *Lysander*, xv.

[2] *Nicias*, xxix.

[3] *Frag.* 40a.

[4] Plutarch, *Alcibiades*, xi.

[5] *Life of Euripides* (Dindorf, p. 3).

> My tomb is the whole of Greece; my bones
> Are held in Macedon, for there
> I died; but Athens did my tones
> Delight, Athens, of Greece most fair.

In face of evidence such as this we can only conclude that Aristophanes was actuated more by personal spite than by a patriotic concern for the well-being of Athens. Such a conclusion need cause us no great surprise, when we remember the undoubted vogue which Euripides, unpopular as he was generally, yet enjoyed with the more advanced young men of his day, and the very great influence which he exercised upon the writers of the New Comedy and especially

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[3] See below, pp. 174 ff.

[2] e.g. the *Andromache* is an attack upon Sparta.

[3] In this respect Aristophanes plays the part of a leader-writer in the popular press, and is worthy of as much attention.

Menander, who, as Quintilian tells us, was a great admirer and studious imitator of Euripides. These influences would have been at work in the days of Aristophanes, and it must have caused him many a jealous pang to see which way the wind was blowing.[1]

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[1] Notice that in the *Clouds* (1364 ff.) the old-fashioned Strepsiades complains that his fashionable son, when asked to sing an ode of Simonides or something out of Æschylus, sang a piece from Euripides; and Dicæopolis, who acts as judge between Æschylus and Euripides in the *Frogs*, says that he admires the former for his wisdom, but he finds more pleasure in the latter:

> "The one I think a wise man, but delight
> Lies with the other." (*Frogs*, 1413.)

## CHAPTER II

### HIS DEFENCE OF WOMEN

For his attempt to raise religion to a higher plane than that on which contemporary Athenians viewed it, Euripides received the name of atheist, and was regarded as an attacker of the national religion. Aristophanes says:

> In his tragedies
> He has persuaded men there are no gods.
> (*Thesmoph.* 450.)

Similarly his defence of women has brought him, thanks largely to the same Aristophanes, the reputation of a traducer of womankind and a hater of the sex. Aristophanes himself does not hesitate to bring the vilest of charges against him, including even pornography, but, although the plays peculiarly referred to in this charge are no longer extant, we are in a position to judge the value of it by analogy. For the *Hippolytus* is extant, and Aristophanes reviled it as soundly as he did any other play, even the story of Sthenebœa, the extant fragments of which are not sufficient for us to form any idea of how Euripides treated it. In the *Frogs* Æschylus is made to say that he represented no Phædras nor Sthenebœas—nor, in fact, any woman in love. This last remark is most instructive. We are apt to forget that Euripides was the first of the three great tragedians to make the love interest the central theme of a play and, although to modern ears this sounds no great crime, it goes far to explain the abuse of Aristophanes, the great champion of conventionality, for herein was an innovation which went clean counter to the accepted ideas of the time about the position of women. We shall have something to say about this shortly. For the moment let us notice that Æschylus does not deny the *truth* of such representations, but only the *expediency*.[1] A poet is the guardian of the young men of the state, and should have a high moral tone. Once again we note, in passing, that same confusion between moral and æsthetic goodness which we saw when dealing with Aristotle's strictures upon the character of Menelaus, but we can afford to waive the point, and leave the reader to judge for himself, after perusing this chapter, concerning the moral effect of Euripides' representations of women. So far as the *Hippolytus* itself is concerned, we cannot agree with Aristophanes that it was likely to do harm. In it Phædra is represented as the victim of the gods; she struggles to overcome her passion for Hippolytus, and is too full of shame to avow it. When the officiousness of the nurse reveals her secret, she puts an end to her life in an agony of despair, and strives to save her honour by a false accusation. Such an expedient may not be ideal, but it is an expedient which clearly convicts all charges of sensuality, which have been brought against the play, of patent falsehood. Let anyone read the *Hippolytus* of Euripides and then read Seneca's play of the same name, and he will agree with Gilbert Murray that "the story which might so easily be made ugly or sensual is treated by Euripides with a delicate and austere purity."[1] No doubt there were not lacking contemporary Athenians to read the play amiss, for to the impure all things are impure, just as there are not lacking contemporary Englishmen to make so-called moral objections to Thomas Hardy's tragedy of a pure woman—*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Now, not only does Euripides treat this particular Phædra-story "with a delicate and austere purity," but he himself actually criticises in most outspoken tones the sensual treatment of such themes as those with which he was charged by Aristophanes! In the *Ion* he puts the following words into the mouth of the Chorus:

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[1] *Euripides.* Dost say of Phædra that I wrote untruly?
*Æschylus.* Nay, truly. But a poet should hide the vile
And not present it; for as masters tell
Their pupils what is right, so poets do men.
And therefore should we always tell fair things.
(*Frogs*, 1052–6.)

Now all ye bards who in evil songs
  Hymn the unlawful doings of Love,
Unholy marriage, and women's other wrongs,
  Mark how in piety we are above
    Man's evil race. (1090–5.)

Obviously he dissociates himself from those whom he here castigates. His *Hippolytus* is a vindication of internal purity above the mere external semblance of purity, and it abounds with touches of the like idealism. The notorious line,

My tongue has sworn; my mind is unconstrained,
(*Hipp*. 612.)

is not, as at first sight it appears, especially when wrenched from its context, a condonation of perjury. Rightly understood it is an expression of sublime idealism, and—be it noted—Hippolytus keeps his oath:

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[1] *Euripides and his Age*, p. 87.

O gods! why is it that I cannot ope my mouth,
Who thus am ruined by you whom I revere?
I am resolved. In no wise should I 'suade
Whom most I must, but break my oath in vain.
(*Ibid.* 1060–3.)

The lesson of internal, as opposed to external, purity is inculcated throughout; in fact, the moral of the play might almost be said to be simply this, that we should strive to be, rather than to seem, good. Thus when the nurse asks Phædra if her hands are free from the stain of blood, Phædra replies:

My hands are pure; the stain is on my soul.
(*Ibid.* 317.)

Nothing but virtue makes life worth living:

For this alone, they say, can hold its own in life,
For those who may, to keep a holy mind
And true. But evil men, whene'er it chance,
Time doth reveal, as mirror held before
A maiden shows her youthful charm. All such
I shun. (*Ibid.* 426–30.)

Well does Phædra—it is she who is speaking—know this, but although she knows it intellectually, her passionate nature will not be controlled by the austere dictates of her knowledge. There is something very human in her frank avowal:

We know and see the right, but do it not,
Some from laziness, and some because
We place some other pleasure higher far
Than what is noble. (*Ibid.* 380–3.)

We are continually told in the *Thesmophoriazusæ* of Aristophanes that Euripides does wrong to women. He does so, presumably, by his representation of them in his tragedies. Let us then examine that representation so far as we have it in the extant tragedies. At once we are met by a strange phenomenon, for no sooner do we open a volume of Euripides than we enter into a palace of good women, through which marches a long procession of heroines—a procession which exhibits finer and more numerous types of female devotion than are afforded by the works of any other tragedian, ancient or modern! Among the whole galaxy of them there are not half a dozen who are not conspicuous for some outstanding virtue. If we look to the home—woman's peculiar sphere—we find, in Alcestis, beloved by all in her house, a picture of wifely devotion which could not be surpassed, and in the opening of the *Electra* we have a surprisingly modern appreciation of the way in which a woman can be a real help-mate to her husband. When a man comes home tired from his work, he finds great joy —we are told—in the comforts of a well-ordered house:

> But when from afield the worker enters in
> His home, 'tis sweet to find things well arranged. (75–6.)

Again, in a humbler sphere, we have in the nurse of the *Hippolytus* a character whose patience, solicitude, and tender care for her mistress are drawn with an insight almost uncanny in a man. Certainly no misogynist could have drawn this one character, to say nothing of Polyxena, Iphigenia and Macaria, whom we will shortly mention. And if we look abroad, to affairs of state, war, and the good of one's country, we find the same. The Aulid Iphigenia is not afraid to give her life for her country's sake, and her courage draws words of high commendation from Achilles:

> Daughter of Agamemnon, my happiness
> Some god was scheming, were I to win thy hand.
> I count Greece happy in thee, and thee in Greece,
> Well hast thou spoken and as thy land deserves.
> (1404–7.)

And not only can the women of Euripides play their part without dishonour in a sphere where a man's courage is required—Iphigenia is no isolated example—but they bring their own womanly virtues with them, to the greater glory of the scenes in which they participate. In the *Suppliants*, for example, it is a woman (Æthra) who obtains burial for the slaughtered Argives. These cannot be the things that moved the indignation of Aristophanes. Where, then, is the solution of the mystery? We must look a little closer; and, as we read, it is not long before the conviction dawns upon us that Euripides must have been misjudged by that commonest of all forms of misrepresentation—by taking words out of their context in his writings and judging them, in isolation, as expressions of his own views. This is, of course, a peculiarly vicious proceeding when the writer in question happens to be a dramatist. In the *Hecuba*, for example, Polymestor, who has perfidiously slain Hecuba's son Polydorus, thus states his wrongs when caught in the net of Hecuba's revenge:

> Hark then. There was a youngest son of Priam,
> Polydorus, child of Hecuba, whom from Troy
> His father sent me, here to rear up safe,
> For he did fear Troy's fall. And him I slew;
> Now listen how I well and wisely slew.
> I feared for thee,[1] that if the boy survived,
> Thine enemy, he might perchance collect
> And found another Troy, and then the Greeks,
> Knowing that son of Priam lived, might launch
> Another host against the land of Troy,
> And raze these plains of Thrace in plundering,
> And so our present ills should fall upon
> Troy's neighbours. Then his mother Hecuba
> Hearing his fate, beguiled me with a tale
> Of hidden Trojan wealth she would reveal.

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[1] He addresses Agamemnon.

My babes and me she led within the tents,
That no one else might know of it. I sat
Upon a couch and bent my knee. Around
Were many hands, all Trojan girls. To left,
To right, they thronged as round a friend, and praised
My garb's Edonian web and held it up
To see. Others my Thracian spear admired,
And stripped me of my double armament.
All who were mothers took in their arms my babes
In admiration, and passed from hand to hand
Far from their sire. Then, quick as thought, they dropped
Fair words, and snatching daggers from their robes,
Stabbed my babes, while others held me down
By hands and legs. And when I strove to aid
My children—if I raised my head—they held
My hair, and if I moved a hand—alas!
Against that crowd of women I could do naught.
And last of all—woe far surpassing woe—
They wrought an awful deed. For taking out
Their brooches, they stabbed and swilled with blood my eyes,
Then fled forth from the tents. I bounded out
Like beast upon them, and as a huntsman does,
I tracked along the wall with jabs and blows.
This I endured on thy behalf, for slaying
Thine enemy, Agamemnon. Briefly put,
I wish to say all ill of womankind
That has been said by them of old, or now,
Or yet to be. For neither sea nor earth
Begets so vile a brood. He knows this best
Who most has had to do with them. (1132–82.)

Read in the play we all understand this as the tirade of a villain who has met his deserts, as Euripides makes quite clear by putting the following remonstrance into the mouth of the Chorus:

Be not so wild, nor for thine ills
Thus blame compactly all the female race.
(*Ibid.* 1183–4.)

But anyone who wanted to misrepresent Euripides would have no scruple in quoting the last six lines as proof that Aristophanes was right in accusing him of wronging womankind. And some such misrepresentation, whether deliberate or accidental, must be assumed in order to account for the evil repute which Euripides has gained on this score. The temptation to wrest lines out of their context in the play would be especially strong in the case of lines which contain a good deal —mere half-truths perhaps—which we must admit to be true of the sex as a whole. This would apply to Hermione's passionate outburst, inspired by jealousy and defeat, in the *Andromache*:

> But never, never—once is not enough
> To say the word—should those who have a wife,
> If they are wise, let women in their homes.
> For they do teach but evil; some destroy
> The bliss of married life for paltry gain;
> Some fall'n in sin companions seek in ill,
> And many from sheer lust. . . . And so the homes
> Of men fare ill. Mind then with bars and bolts
> You guard your homes, for women entering in
> Are cause of many ills, and ne'er do good. (943–53.)

The sentiments are unseemly, as the Chorus are not slow to remark:

> Too bitterly hast thou spoken 'gainst thy race.
> We can forgive thee this. And yet it boots
> That women strive to veil the faults of woman.
> (*Ibid.* 954–6.)

Euripides was peculiarly interested in the psychology of women, and he notes their faults as well as their virtues. The remark which he puts into the mouth of the old servant in the *Phœnissæ*:

> A scandal-loving thing was woman ever.
> Given small cause for talk, she makes it more,
> And takes a joy in speaking ill of others, (198–201.)

is a remark that bespeaks acute observation rather than malice on the poet's part. We must remember that the position of women in society was very different in the days of Euripides from what it is now.

A century later than Euripides the philosopher Aristotle writes as though woman were quite a different creature from man—*even a woman*, he says, may be good. But during the lifetime of Euripides the foremost thinkers of the day were beginning to realise that things were not entirely well in this respect. Euripides himself is one of the first to express this new attitude towards the other sex. With him woman is no longer a chattel. She is seriously regarded, in the *Medea*, for example, as her husband's partner in life, as one factor in the harmony of conjugal relationship:

> Which is the greatest saving-grace of life,
> When wife with husband is not in discord. (14–15.)

Her rights are beginning to be recognised, and her way of looking at life is drawn with considerable sympathy when Euripides makes Medea exclaim:

> Of all the beings possessed of life and thought
> We women are most wretched. For we have
> To buy our husbands with excessive dowry,
> And thereby gain a master for our bodies.
> And worst of all, is this—we run the risk
> Of gaining good or worthless mates. A change
> For woman is disgrace; nor may we choose.
> Then 'mid new customs and new ways of life
> It needs diviner's skill to tell what sort
> One's husband is; for naught is learnt at home.
> If we succeed and solve our problem well,
> The husband stays and lightly bears the yoke,—
> A blissful life. But otherwise, 'twere well
> To die. A man when tired of those within
> Goes from the home, and frees his soul of pain,
> Turning to friend or fellow. But we women
> Have only one to whom we must e'er look.
> They say we live at home a life secure
> From danger, while they with spears contend in fight.
> Vain thought! I'd rather risk my life in fight
> Thrice o'er, than once in giving birth to child.
> (*Ibid.* 230–51.)

But all this is far from the accepted conventions of the age of Euripides. It is difficult for us to realise it now, but the best idea of what the Athenian ideal of women at this time was, may be gathered from the short but significant mention which Pericles makes of them in his funeral oration. The occasion was one of national mourning at the end of the first year of the great Peloponnesian war, and the statesman's object was to console his hearers upon their losses, congratulate them upon their achievements, and hearten them for future efforts. Contrast the appreciation which our statesmen rightly expressed for the manifold services of women in the recent great struggle against Germany with the miserable mention of:

> And if I should speak also of the virtue of women, who are now in mourning, I will say everything in a short commendation. It is your great glory not to become worse than you now are, and to give men as little occasion as possible either to praise or to blame you. (THUCYDIDES, ii. 45.)

It is miserably inadequate, and yet it fairly represents the attitude of the best Athenians of the day. That such is the case is obvious not only from the occasion upon which this speech was delivered, but also from the very interesting fact that this attitude towards women is continually peeping out even in the pages of Euripides, who was beginning to break away from it. In the *Phœnissæ*, for example, when Jocasta bids Antigone go out and stop the single combat between Eteocles and Polynices, her first thought is simply that her modesty won't allow her to face the army. Nor is it merely because of their number. In the *Electra*, when the farmer sees Orestes and Pylades approaching, he bids his wife—Electra—begone indoors:

Disgrace it were
For wife to stand and talk with youthful men. (344.)

And in the *Orestes* Helen endorses this opinion:

It is not well that maids approach the crowd. (108.)

Andromache, in the *Troades*, states the same thought, not without some bitterness:

For first of all—if other blame attach
Or not—this very thing brings ill report—
If women keep not to their homes. (647–9.)

This was the conventional standard of Athenian morality at the time, and judged by this standard the women of Euripides are anything but ideal. In the *Frogs* Aristophanes makes him say:

Then from the earliest verses I allowed
No idle person; my women spoke; my slaves
Did none the less. (948–9.)

To-day this does not seem much of a gibe, but it seemed worth making to Aristophanes and he knew what his audience would appreciate. In fact Euripides incurred the wrath of Aristophanes, not because he "does wrong to women," but just because he represents them—in spite of the occasional lip-service, which we have noticed—as violating the standard of conventional morality in this respect. That the greatest service woman could do to the course of civilisation was to violate this morality was, no doubt, one of the sincerest convictions of Euripides. With the possible exception of Plato, he is the only ancient writer who perceived how far an imperfect ideal of woman can go in undermining the stability of society. But Aristophanes was, above everything, the champion of conventionality, and was probably quite sincere in thinking that the outspokenness of the "new women" in Euripides was something immoral. But when judged by a higher standard than that to which Aristophanes was capable of rising, Euripides is no slanderer of women but a vindicator of their rights and virtues as beings not inferior to men. So we get the paradox that Euripides seemed to Aristophanes to "do wrong to women" not because he thought worse of them, but because he thought better of them than Aristophanes himself did.

Here then we have discovered a further reason—in addition to the misrepresentation caused by taking lines out of their context—to account for the reputation which Euripides gained as a slanderer of woman. Moreover, some misapprehension would no doubt arise from his delight in the more complicated psychology of women—in representing women, such as Hermione in the *Andromache*, not as faultlessly perfect dolls, but as human beings neither entirely good nor entirely bad. These "mixed" characters really make a large part of Euripides' claim to be a great delineator of character. Consider, for example, Medea, an odious infanticide, whom Euripides nevertheless endows with all a mother's tender feelings. Could anything be better than her struggle with herself in the following lines?

> O children, children, you have a town and home,
> Where you will live deprived of wretched me,
> Without a mother; while I in exile go
> To other land before I've joy in you
> Or see you happy, before I deck the couch
> For your betrothal and hold aloft the torch.
> O wretch I am for my hard-heartedness!
> In vain I reared you, children, all in vain

Endured the pangs of labour at your birth.
Full many hopes I had—unhappy me!—
That you would be a blessing to my age,
And lay me out with loving hands in death,
As all desire. Gone now is that sweet thought.
For 'reft of you a grievous life is mine,
Bitter to myself. And as for you, no more
With loving eyes shall you behold your mother,
In that new walk of life which you must tread.
  [Alas! alas! why gaze your eyes upon me?
Why smile, my children, with this latest smile?
Ah! what shall I do? I cannot steel my heart,
As I look upon the bright eyes of my babes.
I will not do it. Farewell, designs of yore!]
I will take my children from the land. What need
Myself to reap a double dose of ills,
That sire of theirs may grieve at their distress?
I will not do it. Farewell, designs of yore!
  [And yet what happens? Shall I bear ridicule
For letting my foes depart unharmed? I must
Assay this deed. O cowardice that lets
These gentle words creep in upon my soul!
Get ye within, my children! Look to yourself,
Whosoe'er should not behold my sacrifice.
I will make strong my hand.] Ah me! alas!
Do not, my soul, do not assay the deed!
Let them alone, unhappy one, oh spare
Thy children! In life they'll bring thee joy out there.]
  This shall not be, ye nether fiends of Hell,
I will not leave my babes for foes to insult.
They will be put to death in any case;
So we who bare them will dispatch them too.
It is decreed, and cannot be undone.
The tyrant's bride, with chaplet on her head,
Is dying in my robes, I know it well.
But as for me, I go a joyless road,
And send my children on a more joyless still;
I would address them. Come, my children, give
Your hands unto your mother for a kiss.
Oh dearest hand! Oh dearest lips to me!
Oh children's form and face of noble birth!
May you be happy—but not here. Your sire
Has ta'en that quite away. Oh sweet embrace!
Oh tender flesh and sweetest breath of babes!
Farewell! Farewell! No longer can I look
At you. Evil o'ercomes me. And I know
How great an evil I intend to do.
But passion overcometh my desires,
And this is cause of greatest ill to men. (1021–80.)

We see here a heartless barbarian, in some sense, who allows her revenge to overcome her mother's feelings, but it is not done without heartrending pangs, and at one moment she definitely gives up her resolve. That Medea was a barbarian, and not a Greek, has been insisted upon by several apologists for her character. But this is, I submit, to miss the whole point of the play, for, if it means anything, it means that we ought to make allowances for the fact that Medea has not enjoyed the advantages of Hellenic civilisation and so cannot be expected to behave as a Greek woman should. But the whole interest of the character is just this—that it shows us a woman on a plane *not below, but above*, the standard of Athenian morality. Of course she does not move freely there, and is far from being wholly in the right, for when an old standard is giving way to a new one, no human being can guide his or her life with security. Tragedy is bound to result. But Euripides makes it abundantly clear to us that we are not to judge Medea by the old conventional standard. Things are changing; woman has been wronged in the past:

Up to their founts flow the courses of rivers,
  Justice and everything is hurled from its seat;
The religion of heaven is shattered to shivers,
  And the counsels of men are full of deceit.
My fame shall increase as men bring me renown;
  There cometh for women a glory renewed,
Instead of ill fame there cometh a crown.

The strains of old bards shall not tell us for long
  How unfaithful is woman, how spiteful her ire.
For Apollo the leader of musical song
  Ne'er gave to us women the gift of the lyre.
For then we'd have sung in reply to the men.
  But now comes a time, many years lie ahead,
To sing of our life and of man's life again.

(*Ibid.* 410–30.)

Medea is herself above the old standard or, at least, a protest against it. In a word, she stands for a higher conception of woman's relation to man. Of course this is not explicitly stated in the play—for Euripides is writing a play, a drama of human life, and not a piece of social propaganda—but for the discerning it is unmistakedly implied. Woman is, we are told, more than a mother—she is capable of a higher culture than that allowed her by the conventional Athenian standard of the day. So the Chorus of women sing:

> Often ere this we've formed a good chorus,
>   And built up a story, and entered the field
> To battle with forces too gigantic for us.
>   For we have our talents, our lips are unsealed.
> Not all, but a few, of our race have been led
> To the source of the Muses, so it cannot be said
> That the race of all women to music is dead.
>
> (*Ibid.* 1081–9.)

Now if we are correct in explaining as we have done the abuse of Aristophanes, we shall not be surprised, but shall—on the contrary—rather expect to find a very high ideal of woman's possibilities portrayed by Euripides. Such is, of course, the case. Examples need not be quoted at length, but I cannot forbear to mention the resolute spirit with which Polyxena in the *Hecuba* faces her death, and the superb disdain with which she meets the shame-faced approach of Odysseus, its messenger:

> I see, Odysseus, how thou hid'st thy hand
> Beneath thy robe, and hold'st thy head away
> In order that I may not clasp thy beard.
> Fear not. My supplication has passed o'er.
> Follow I will, for by constraint I must,
> And death is welcome. For if I feared to die
> I should be held a base and cowardly woman.
>
> (342–8.)

Such noble words are too much for the girl's mother, Hecuba, who offers to die in her daughter's place:

> Well spoken, daughter; but in that "well" lies grief.
> If grace to Peleus' son is due, and if,
> Odysseus, thou would'st flee reproach, then slay
> Her not, but take me to Achilles' pyre
> And slay me without mercy. 'Twas I who bore
> Paris, who slew the son of Thetis with his shafts.
> (*Ibid.* 382–8.)

Nothing, however, will satisfy the shade of Achilles except the sacrifice of Polyxena, who dies a willing martyr:

> O Argives, ye who have destroyed my town,
> Willingly I die. Let none lay hand on me.
> With right good heart I will offer my neck. So leave
> Me free! By heaven, I will not die in bonds.
> For in the under-world 'twere shame for me,
> A royal princess, to be called a slave.
> (*Ibid.* 547–52.)

In strange contrast to the charges of sensuality—Phædras and Stheneboeas—brought by Aristophanes, the reader should notice in passing the delicate, almost squeamish, modesty with which Euripides is at pains — somewhat ludicrously in such a situation — to endow her:

> For even in death
> She showed great care to fall in seemly wise,
> And hide what eyes of men should not perceive.
> (*Ibid.* 568–70.)

This character of Polyxena is far more typical of the women of Euripides than is the abnormal Medea. His interest in such characters as Medea and Hermione has served Euripides' reputation ill; but we must remember that such women are the exception and not the rule in his plays. If in the *Medea* we have an awful picture of what a woman, whose primary instincts have been violated, is capable of, we have, on the other hand, a short passage in the *Andromache* which hints at an almost inconceivable height of idealism—at what one editor calls "a magnificent, though impossible concession to true affection." Andromache has been upbraiding Hermione with her jealous conduct, and then bursts out with these astounding words as she contrasts her own forbearance in the past with Hermione's frenzied jealousy:

> O dearest Hector, for thy sake have I
> Loved e'en the mistress passion led thee to.
> And to thy bastards I have given suck
> Ere this, that I might not fall foul of thee,
> And by such conduct have I shown my worth
> And won my husband back.[1] (222–7.)

Whatever we may think of this, there can be no two opinions about the truth of the text which it is used to illustrate:

> It is not beauty, woman,
> But virtue that brings joy to husband's heart.
> (*Ibid.* 207–8.)

The relation of husband and wife is the main theme of one of the most remarkable of the plays. This play—the *Alcestis*—is a sort of tragi-comedy. Greek plays were generally presented in trilogies—three at a time—and the hearing of them was for the audience the main business of a day. But in order not to send his audience away in too heavy a mood, after a surfeit of tragedy, the dramatist would conclude his three main plays with something in lighter vein, which was called a satyr-play because satyrs often took the chief parts, much as clowns do with us in a modern piece of buffoonery. Now the *Alcestis* is by no means a satyr-play, but it was acted in the place of one, as the fourth piece, given after three regular tragedies. The story is roughly as follows: Admetus, the King of Pheræ, has been condemned by fate to death, but Apollo, who owes a debt of gratitude to the house of Admetus for its kindly treatment of him when in mortal servitude, gains his respite, provided that some-one can be found willing to die in his place.[1] Neither his aged father, Pheres, nor any of his friends can be prevailed upon to fill this rôle, so his wife Alcestis offers to do so. Then comes a touching passage of farewell to all in the house, when Heracles, on his way to Thrace to perform one of his labours, happens to call. Reluctantly—for he sees that something is amiss—he accepts the proffered hospitality, and finally gives himself up to unrestrained feasting and jollity. Then, having heard from a slave how matters stand with the family, he grapples with and overcomes Death—who comes as a person in the play for his victim—and, in return for the hospitable entertainment which he has received, rescues Alcestis and restores her to her astonished husband. The reader must be content with this bald summary of the story, for if we started to quote we should have to quote half the play. But he can readily see what the Greeks themselves thought of the character of Alcestis from the mention which Plato happens to have made of the incident in his dialogue, *Symposium.* He says:

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[1] So far as I have observed, no commentator has remarked the similarity of these sentiments with what is recorded, by the ancient biographers, of Euripides himself. Cephisophon, the favourite slave whom Euripides educated and who is said to have collaborated with him in his plays, seduced his master's wife. Whereupon Euripides "at first tried to dissuade him from his sin, but when he did not prevail, he relinquished his wife unto him, since Cephisophon wished to have her" (*Life*, p. 6, Dindorf). The legend is examined and dismissed as improbable by Decharme in his *Euripides and the Spirit of his Dramas* (pp. 7–9 in Loeb's translation), but the present passage lends some probability to an otherwise incredible story.

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[1] The idea sounds strange to modern ears, but was not so to the Greeks. Compare *Andromache*, 410; *Supplices*, 1112–13; *Phœnissæ*, 968–9, etc.

> Verily it is only those who love that are willing to die one for the other, be they men or be they women. This has Alcestis, daughter of Pelias, sufficiently witnessed unto the Greeks, in that she alone was willing to die in her husband's stead, though both his father and mother were living, whom she through her love so far outstripped in kindness as to convict them of being strangers to their own son and related only in name. And in doing this action she seemed to have acted so nobly, not only in the eyes of men, but in those of the gods also, that—although many men have done many fair deeds—the gods have given to few what they granted her, that her soul should come up again from Hades. (179b.)

This is how no less thoughtful a writer than Plato speaks of one of the characters of a dramatist whom Aristophanes has represented as the slanderer of womankind.

# CHAPTER III

## THE FINENESS OF THE COMMONPLACE

It has often been felt that Euripides, lacking as he does the Titanic sublimity of Æschylus, lacking the perfect, harmonious grace of Sophocles—that singer of sweet Colonus whose songs appealed so powerfully across the ages to our own poet, Matthew Arnold, finding in him some peculiarly responsive chord—it has been felt that Euripides, lacking these qualities, is actually guilty of something like a *faux pas* in taste. He is commonplace and banal in tone. As Aristophanes urged, he lowered the dignity of tragedy by

> Presenting common things with which we live
> And which we use. (*Frogs*, 959.)

This is a somewhat vague charge, and there is some danger that in our examination of it we may be thought loth to come to grips with the real point at issue. To avoid giving this impression, let us try to define the charge more specifically at the outset. The trouble is that the only concrete instances which Aristophanes gives, either in the *Frogs* or in the *Acharnians*, to substantiate this charge can hardly be taken seriously. In the latter play, for example, we read of how Dicæopolis, having to plead before the assembly, comes to borrow rags from Euripides, in order to move the pity of his judges, and is given the rags of Telephus, a Mysian king, who in the play of

Euripides of that title goes disguised as a beggar into the enemy's camp. This, then, is the horrid truth. Ragged beggars actually appeared as characters in a Greek play! Aristophanes makes excellent fun of all this, and most of us are content, quite rightly, to enjoy it as such. But, supposing that nothing but fragments of Euripides were extant and we were asked to analyse the impression made upon our minds by this fun, should we not have to confess that it would lead us to form what from the extant plays we can see would be a very mistaken judgment? We should get an idea of rags and filth comparable to the *mise en scène* of a Zola, whereas, as a matter of fact, the "common things" amounted to no more than a rustic simplicity suitable to such an idyllic picture as we find, for example, in Thomas Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Thus we have in the *Electra* the humble farmer to whom the daughter of Agamemnon has been given in marriage, that she may not bear a son of noble stock, who would be more likely, than one sprung of a humble father, to take vengeance upon Ægisthus. But the description of these surroundings is by no means sordid. It is rather a beautifully idyllic picture of the dignity of toil. Electra appears drawing water:

> O night of darkness, nurse of golden stars,
> Wherein, with pitcher on my head, I go
> And come, drawing water from the river's source. (54–6.)

Her farmer-husband is a noble character, who will not take advantage of the position in which he finds himself, and treats her with a tenderness and respect which we should be happy to feel were typical of conjugal relationships in Greece. He does not like to see one so highly born labouring at menial tasks, and protests:

Wherefore, unhappy one, dost labour so
On my behalf, though reared in noble style?
Why wilt not cease although I bid thee to? (*Ibid.* 64–6.)

Electra feels and appreciates the kindness of all this, but insists that it is her duty and her right to help her husband all she may:

I count thee as the gods in friendliness,
For in my troubles thou hast mocked me not.
And this for mortals is the greatest balm
Of sorrow, to find a healer for their woes,
As I find thee. And so, though bidden not,
I must share in thy labours, as I may,
And thus make light thy load. Affairs abroad
Are quite enough for thee. The household things
It is but right for me to help arrange. (*Ibid.* 67–75.)

Whereupon the peasant, her husband—thankful, maybe, at finding so much commonsense in a "lady"—passes on with some remark about the dignity of toil:

Pass on, if so it please thee. For indeed
The wells are not far distant from this house.
I at the dawn will drive my oxen forth
To plough and sow. For none can earn a living
By sitting idle in the house at prayer. (*Ibid.* 77–81.)

Pictures of rustic simplicity such as this are the nearest approach, in the extant plays, to the "common things" with which Aristophanes taunts Euripides. To those accustomed to the dignity of Æschylus and the serenity of Sophocles they were, no doubt, startling enough. In the *Hippolytus*, for example, the Chorus first hear of the troubles of Phædra from an informant who is washing clothes in the open air:

There is a rock from which up-springs
  A running stream, which seaward flows,
Oft caught in pitchers as it flings
  Its spray around, and onward goes.
Here sat a friend of mine bedewing
  Bright clothes in river flowing by,

Which when she'd washed she was bestrewing
  Out on the sunny rocks to dry.
From her it was that first I heard
  Sad tidings of my mistress come. (121-30.)

But the grace and dignity of it all are comparable to the episode of Nausicaa in Homer's Odyssey. In the *Helena* it is the Chorus itself that is engaged in the like humble task:

By sedge and bent, near the water blue,
  Once, as it chanced, I was drying
Robes that were flashing all scarlet in hue,
  As in the sun's rays they were lying. (179-82.)

Such things were, no doubt, innovations—just think, the Chorus of a Greek tragedy washing clothes!—but there is no reason why, provided that they be not obtruded upon our notice in a distressing manner, they should be less adapted to dramatic than to epic poetry. For my part I find them as charming in Euripides as in Homer. They add a homely, human touch, which comes as a pleasant change from the rather superhuman grandeur of Æschylus. They are, in some sense, realistic touches, but they bespeak a realism which is not inconsistent with idealism.

There is, no doubt, a kind of realism which excludes idealism, but it was unknown to the Greeks. They were a realistic people in the sense that they looked directly at things, and saw them for what they were. Their Homeric heroes, for example, had a frankness and openness of heart which made them not ashamed to weep when they felt sad. The little everyday things of life—

common things with which we live
And which we use—

meant more to the Greeks than they usually do to us moderns. No Greek would have surrounded himself with the ugliness of modern civilisation. If we did not know this from other sources, it would be sufficiently obvious from the artistic beauty of their pots and pans. Greek vases—not only ornamental ones, which were indeed the exception rather than the rule, but those intended for use—water-jugs, drinking vessels and such-like—are famous for their beauty, and tell us that the Greeks as a whole must have taken a positive joy in the little, everyday things of life, which the complexity and bustle of our machine-driven existence of to-day denies us. It is only in rare moments—when we are on holiday, perhaps—that we can attain to any realisation of what such simple things as clean dishes, clean pots of beautiful shape, fresh fruit,—figs and olives—vegetables,—onions, radishes, garlic and such-like—could mean to a Greek with his sane, healthy and leisurely outlook upon life. He had leisure to observe the beauty of common things, and it is largely because we lack such leisure that we speak of "the Greek gift of spiritualising material things." [1] To the leisurely all things can be spiritual, or, at least, have some spiritual value. Rupert Brooke, among modern writers, expresses this well when he writes:

These I have loved: White plates and cups, clean-gleaming,
Ringed with blue lines; and feathery, faery dust;
Wet roofs, beneath the lamp-light; the strong crust
Of friendly bread; and many-tasting food;
Rainbows; and the blue bitter smoke of wood;
And radiant raindrops couching in cool flowers;
And flowers themselves, that sway through sunny hours,
Dreaming of moths that drink them under the moon;
Then, the cool kindliness of sheets, that soon

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[1] R. W. Livingstone, *The Greek Genius and its Meaning to us*, p. 143.

Smooth away trouble; and the rough male kiss
Of blankets; grainy wood; live hair that is
Shining and free; blue-massing clouds; the keen
Unpassioned beauty of a great machine;
The benison of hot water; furs to touch;
The good smell of old clothes; and other such—
The comfortable smell of friendly fingers,
Hair's fragrance, and the musty reek that lingers
About dead leaves and last year's ferns. . . .

Walter Pater is another modern writer who had the same feeling. There is no more significant indication of how he caught the spirit of the ancient world than the way in which in his *Marius the Epicurean* he makes the young Marius take a lingering, almost caressing, delight not only in the details of ritual observances, duly and solemnly and slowly performed, but also in the nice performance of everyday acts. It is an attitude of mind, natural to childhood, which it should be the object of a liberal education, in some part, to preserve—the power, that is, of perceiving and appreciating the essentials of life amid the trivialities that enwrap it. Thus Pater writes of the young Marius, "and he had experienced already that education largely increased one's capacity for enjoyment. He was acquiring what it is the chief function of all higher education to impart, the art, namely, of so relieving the ideal or poetic traits, the elements of distinction in our everyday life—of so exclusively living in them—that the unadorned remainder of it, the mere drift or débris of our days, comes to be as though it were not" (*Marius the Epicurean*, ch. iv. *sub fin.*).

We live surrounded by beauty—could we but see it—the red-tiled roofs of cottages shining in the sun after rain, the lithesome form of some fisher-lad in his close-fitting jersey of blue, an apple hanging upon a tree, these are things unnoticed by us, because they are

> common things with which we live
> And which we use.

But it was not so with the Greeks. One of the most beautiful fragments of Sappho literally translated runs as follows:

> As a sweet-apple ripens at the end of a branch, the topmost apple on the topmost branch, and the apple-gatherers have forgotten it, or, rather, were unable to reach it; or like as the hyacinth-flower which shepherd-men press down with their feet on the mountains, and its bright bloom is on the ground. . . .

An apple hanging upon a tree, a flower trodden down by the feet of shepherds, simply this and no more! Yet it is beautiful, because it is simple, common and everyday. It is one of the

> common things with which we live
> And which we use.

We do not often think of Euripides and Wordsworth together, yet, in this respect, there is something in common between them. Each lived the life of a recluse, Wordsworth at Grasmere, far from the turmoil of life, and Euripides in the seclusion of his cave on Salamis. We can imagine him, upon one of his rare visits to Athens, standing amid the bustle of the market-place, and feeling with Wordsworth that:

> The world is too much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending we lay waste our powers:
> Little we see in nature that is ours;
> We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
> The sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
> The winds that will be howling at all hours,
> And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
> For this, for everything, we are out of tune.

Wordsworth says:

> There was a time when meadow, grove and stream,
> The earth, *and every common sight*
> To me did seem
> Apparelled in celestial light;

and Euripides preserves this idealist's attitude to "every common sight." It is peculiarly the poet's, and, as Wordsworth reminds us, the child's attitude.

> Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
> Shades of the prison-house begin to close
> Upon the growing Boy,
> But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
> He sees it in his joy.
> The Youth, who daily further from the East
> Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
> And by the vision splendid,
> Is on his way attended;
> At length the Man perceives it die away,
> And fade into the light of common day.

To the poet, and to the child, there is no such thing as a common day. In fact nothing is common; everything is wonderful. When we were children, as Thomas Traherne reminds us, "the corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold: the gates were the end of the world. The green trees when I saw them first through one of the gates transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things. The men! O what venerable and reverend creatures did the aged seem! Immortal Cherubims! And young men glittering and sparkling Angels, and maids strange seraphic pieces of life and beauty! Boys and girls tumbling in the street, and playing, were moving jewels. I knew not that they were born or should die; but all things abided eternally as they were in their proper places."

Shades of the prison-house block this splendid vision from the life of the grown man; but the beauty is there, if we can find the light with which to see it. The facts themselves—whether apples hanging on trees, or murderers approaching their victims—may be regarded as neutral, mere facts signifying nothing. Their significance to a human soul depends upon the way in which the artist represents them. The artist may be either a realist or an idealist; and perhaps it will help if we try to define these terms. There are two common misconceptions about realism and idealism. People often talk as though the difference were one between the gruesome and the pleasant. But facts are in themselves neutral; they become gruesome only when they overwhelm man by their horror, and pleasant only when he finds delight in them. It is quite possible with an unconquerable idealist such as W. E. Henley, to have idealism speaking, as it were, from the very depths of the gruesome, as he does in the well-known lines:

> Out of the night that covers me,
> Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
> I thank whatever gods may be
> For my unconquerable soul.
>
> In the fell clutch of circumstance
> I have not winced nor cried aloud,
> Under the bludgeonings of chance
> My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Nor is the difference one between the man who looks facts in the face and the man who flees from them to the realms of imagination. Euripides looked facts in the face[1]:

> Presenting common things with which we live
> And which we use.

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[1] Hence a note of cynicism at times; vide *Medea*, 85–6; 561; 965.

The difference between realism and idealism in art depends upon the degree to which the artist expresses himself in his work. Strictly speaking there is no such thing as realism in art; it belongs only to photography. But we use the expression to describe a work of art in which the objective factor counts for more than the subjective, in which the artist is, as it were, overwhelmed by the facts, and presents them to us crudely—in masses—not duly digested by himself—without selection. The realist throws the facts at us, not that he thinks facts have any significance in themselves, apart from sentient man, but because he feels man's insignificance before them. Hence the pessimistic tendency of realism. The idealist, on the other hand, stresses the subjective side; he recognises the personal factor, which alone gives significance to the facts by interpreting them. Apart from interpretation they are mere facts—signifying nothing. Of course the interpretation must be true—an interpretation true to life, as we say. For there is an objective as well as a subjective side to things, and there is something false—and therefore unsatisfying—in that extreme of idealism, familiar to us all in Virgil's Eclogues, by which the subjective feelings of man are read without warrant, but by what Ruskin called a "pathetic fallacy," into the external universe of nature. We get the same pathetic fallacy when Milton writes:

> Thee, shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves
> With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,
> And all their echoes mourn.

But just as we must not go to this extreme of idealism, so we must not take the facts for such as, at first glance, they appear to be, in all their cold, impersonal hardness. We must interpret them in human values. The idealist sees in them a significance which transcends the particular facts, which bathes them in the light that never was on sea or land, which is to say, in the light that shines from his own soul. Just as a philosopher sees a universal in every particular, so the idealist sees more than the realist. He is the poet *par excellence*, whether he write in verse or prose, and the difference between poetry and prose is just such a difference as this.[1] The difference lies not in seeing or not seeing the facts, but in the interpretation of them. The realist doesn't interpret them at all, whereas the idealist does. He sees what they stand for, and, as it were, represent. In Platonic language we may say that the realist sees only phenomena: but these can only be understood, or interpreted, by a comprehension of the ideas which they embody. These ideas the idealist comprehends, and according to his comprehension, so he interprets the facts. His "interpretation" is like the preservation, amid the complexity of life, of the freshness and directness of the early world, or of childhood. To children the things of everyday life, the "common things," are beautiful, and they were habitually more so to the Greeks than they are to us. Euripides, then, is essentially Greek in seeing a fineness in them—in idealising them, if you like—and therefore not excluding them from his plays. The fault is ours—or rather Aristophanes'—if we object, for to the spiritual all things are spiritual. Everything depends upon how we look at them. The illumination must come, to some extent, from within.[1] If some have eyes, yet see not, they must blame themselves, and not the poets who can still see the beauty of common things. Euripides tried to do this; he tried to see the beauty of everyday things, and did not so much "lower the tone of tragedy," as raise the tone of everyday life. His is the work of the idealist whom we can still see in the features of the two busts at Naples, of which Mahaffy[2] writes: "The face is that of an elderly and very thoughtful man, with noble features, and of great beauty, but not without an expression of patience and of sorrow."[3]

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[1] Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451b, 6: "Poetry rather tells of the universal, history of the particular."

Idealistic, in the sense which we have tried to define, Euripides certainly is; but is he also, as some critics suggest,[4] sentimental? The answer depends upon the meaning which we attach to the word. If we mean by it the arousing of a sense of pathos, then Euripides was a master-sentimentalist; but we ought to mean by it the illegitimate arousing of pathetic emotion to a degree not justified by the triviality of the events which call it forth. Euripides never does this. His pathos is produced by the most tragic of circumstances, and his treatment never lacks the high seriousness due to tragedy. So that, in the strict sense of the word, we must admit that he always avoids sentimentalism, as indeed an ancient author necessarily does, for sentimentalism is a modern development of Romanticism. Its chief vice is that it gives a false value to the facts—it is a sort of morbid idealism, in which the subjective factor of "interpretation" has gone astray. "Thought" plays a part both in sentimentalism and in idealism, but in the latter it is a guiding or controlling principle; in the former it is a morbid reaction, an exaggerated reflex, the almost unconscious reaction of the "ego" upon a world of facts which overwhelm it. It feels itself lost in the infinite—groping about in worlds not realised. Idealism interprets the facts, which it keeps in hand, as it were, and gives a true, *human*, value to them: sentimentalism gives a false, *personal*, value to them—it wallows among them, instead of trying to interpret them. In "classicism" this act of interpretation, which we have seen to be so essential a part of idealism, is kept sane by a reference to reality, by the untroubled perception of things, clear-cut, and seen in their essentials. We get it in Virgil in such lines as:

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[1] Cf. Emerson's remark that we are all poets when we read a poem well.

[2] *History of Greek Literature*, vol. i., p. 323.

[3] See the frontispiece.

[4] e.g. Haigh, *Tragic Drama of the Greeks*, writes: "Another characteristic which, no less than his realism, distinguishes Euripides from the older tragic poets, and marks him out as the forerunner of the romantic school of dramatists, is his tenderness and sentimentality."

> Candidus insuetum miratur limen Olympi
> Sub pedibusque videt nubes et sidera Daphnis,

where the picture has all the perfection, all the serenity, of a cameo, or a Greek gem. The same definiteness, as it were, is in the lines of a Greek temple, in those wonderful columns of the Olympieion, for example, still standing at Athens, which inspire us with such different feelings from the vague aspirations which we get by gazing up at the tracery, ever reaching beyond itself, of a Gothic cathedral. Such vague aspirations are the outcome of thought turned upon itself, reaching to realms that pass beyond human knowledge, into

"Romanticism" in fact, where the mind plays with things which we cannot know to be true, but which are, as we say, mere romance. It is only in this region that, given an excessive introspection, a breaking away of thought from reality, things can become "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," and sentimentalism is a species of this unreality, from which classicism is ever preserved.

Such then is the general spirit in which we should regard the numerous homely, or commonplace, touches with which Euripides abounds. He finds man "as he is" sufficiently fine, and surrounds him by no false glamour of the heroic age. Thus, as Haigh has pointed out,[1] Agamemnon, the commander of the Grecian fleet, becomes "an irresolute and querulous old man, who shrinks in dismay before the anger of his wife, and sits weeping in his tent, the picture of indecision, writing letter after letter, and tearing them up as soon as written."[2] Homely incidents, besides homely characters, abound. The same critic, a few lines later, thus summarises the arrival of Agamemnon's wife and family at Aulis: "The bustle of the chariot's approach, the servants holding the horses' heads and helping the ladies to dismount, Clytemnestra's orders for the disposal of the luggage and her anxiety for the baby's safety, are all reproduced with circumstantial accuracy, like a description in a novel."[3] When the situation demands it, even sordid details are introduced. In the *Helena* Menelaus is brought upon the stage immediately after shipwreck, and he appears as a shipwrecked mariner should appear. In his wretched condition he is ashamed to approach people in order to ask about the land upon which he has been cast. As he himself says:

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[1] *Tragic Drama of the Greeks*, p. 219.

[2] *Iph. Aul.* 34–42; 730–50.

[3] *Ibid.* 607–30.

> I was ashamed to accost the crowd and ask
> Of them, for shame did bid me hide my rags. (416–17.)

But he has neither food nor raiment, and cannot choose:

> But need compels me; for no food is here,
> Nor have I clothes to don, as you may judge
> By what I wear—mere jetsam from the ship. (420–2.)

Again, in the *Ion*, at the opening of the play, we see the young acolyte, like George Herbert's sexton, engaged in the lowly task of sweeping out the temple of Apollo with a broom. Ion is no underling to be engaged in such a service, but a protagonist of the drama, and it is a far cry from his lowly office to the heroic grandeur of the Æschylean stage. But, nevertheless, there is something fine about the picture. He exclaims quite simply:

> How fine, Apollo, it is and meet
> To serve before thy halls in honour
> Of thy prophetic seat. (128–30.)

It is symbolical of the new attitude of Euripides, who finds dignity in places where neither Æschylus nor Sophocles suspected it.

Apart from this general attitude, it should be noted that Euripides, with consummate art, often uses homely touches to enhance the pathos of a tragic situation. This is the effect of the picture of the sisterly affection of Electra, as she sits by the bed of Orestes, ministering to him in his frenzy and solicitous that the Chorus should not awaken him from sleep.[1] It is even more remarkable in the *Hecuba* where we have a wonderful description of a humble Trojan and his wife retiring to rest all unconscious of the imminent fate of their city:

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[1] *Orestes*, 140 ff.

No more, O Troy my native land,
  Shalt thou be called unsacked.
Their way 'gainst thee a Grecian band
  With spear on spear has hacked.
Shorn of thy crown of towers, thy head
  With stain of fire is fraught.
Thy streets again I shall not tread—
  At midnight was I caught.
What time sweet sleep knits up our eyes,
  And feasting all is sped,
The dance and choral sacrifice
  My spouse had left for bed.
His spear was laid upon its hook,
  No foeman in the land,
While I was doing my hair and took
  My mirror in my hand.
I looked upon its endless rays
  Ere on my couch I fell;
When sudden through the city's ways
  Was heard a ringing yell.
Then foeman called with hearty cheer,
  "O Sons of Greece, come fast,
Bring fire, bring fire, where Troy does rear
  Its citadel, at last!"
With but one garment clad amiss,
  Like Dorian maid, I sought
The help of holy Artemis;
  But it availed me naught.
My husband falls by foeman's lance.
  They haul me from the shore,
And as I leave I dart a glance
  At home I'll see no more.
I faint from grief, and cast a curse
  On sister of the Twins,
On Shepherd Paris—no name is worse,
  Nor greater loathing wins.
That marriage 'reft me of my home,
  A marriage sent from hell!
Such as I pray may never come
  Again to ring our knell. (905–42.)

We are made to see it all, the sleeping warrior with his spear hanging over his bed, the wife doing her hair before her mirror, then creeping softly into bed to join her husband, when suddenly comes the alarm, with such heightened contrast to the peaceful scene. A note such as this is typical of the Euripidean chorus, of which an American scholar[1] says that they "base their strength and effectiveness on realistic touches, on familiar pictures, on pathetic notes, and on lyrical outbursts of passions deeply human. Thus they come much nearer to being real men and women than the choruses of either Æschylus or Sophocles." But the note is not confined to the chorus; it pervades the whole of his plays, for it is a part of Euripides' general attitude to life.

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[1] A. E. Phoutrides in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. xxvii., p. 130.

# CHAPTER IV

## INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STANDARDS OF MORALITY

If we could have overheard the conversation of average Athenians just after they had witnessed the performance of one of the plays of Euripides, we should probably have found them saying about their own poet very much what the Corinthians said to the Spartans about the Athenians themselves. They considered them, it will be remembered, restless innovators with distressingly acute intellects, unwilling to sit down quietly at home and take things as they found them, but born, seemingly, to be themselves strangers to peace and not to suffer others to enjoy it (Thuc. i. 70). So Euripides was constitutionally incapable of letting things alone; he could not help asking questions, and he questioned what had never been questioned before. He would probe deep, and would not take things at their surface value. There was a restless spirit about him, very different from the spirit of Sophocles,

> Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole.

Euripides never got life focussed thus; it was always blurred at the edges. But to the centre he did send some penetrating glances—glances that pierced right through externals and revealed the inner core of things. He was far more contemplative—introspective, if you like—than either Æschylus or Sophocles, and his brooding spirit showed him much in the heart of man that left his great predecessors unconcerned.

Aristophanes, with the insight of genius, perceived this new quality in him, and caricatured it, with the unscrupulousness of all satire, when he represented him as praying to "keen-smelling nostrils" (*Frogs*, 893)—and asserting that he had taught the Athenians

> To think, perceive and comprehend, to twist,
> And love, and machinate; ills to suspect
> And ill things to devise. (*Frogs*, 957.)

Thus he would seem to have taught them that a man who took another's life was no murderer[1]; that the real murderer need never have touched the weapon that slew his victim[2]; that murder is quite compatible with respectability[3]; that life is death and death life[4]; that friends in name may be enemies in deed[5]; that wisdom is foolishness,[6] and many another seeming contradiction. Many of these do not seem great paradoxes now, but over two thousand years ago they no doubt seemed almost perverse distortions of the truth to the more simple-minded of the Greeks. Euripides did not write for the simple-minded, but for the thoughtful; and the thoughtful are the first to recognise that it is no easy matter to form a correct moral judgment. This truth is a favourite one with Euripides, who never tires of telling us that the ordinary, external, criteria are of no use for judging of the moral worth of an individual. Life has become too complex for such simplicity:

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[1] *Rhesus*, 939.
[2] *Iph. Aul.* 938.
[3] *Electra*, 1092.
[4] *Frag.* 830; *Alcestis*, 142 and 521; *Helena*, 138.
[5] *Orestes*, 434.
[6] *Bacchæ*, 395; *Phœn.* 357; *Hipp.* 1034.

We have no sure and certain test of worth,
For the temperaments of men are so confused.
Son I have seen of noble sire worth naught,
And noble children sprung from worthless sires,
Meanness of soul in rich men, and in poor
A high-souled spirit though clothed in poverty.
How then can one distinguish and judge well?
By wealth? No worse test could be used. What then?
By poverty? That is a vicious test,
For want itself does teach men what is wrong.
Shall I then turn to martial arms? But who
Can judge of courage by a glance at spears?
'Tis best to leave such problems unresolved.
(*Electra*, 367–79.)

Thus does Orestes moralize. Of all external criteria we are most inclined to give attention to birth; but Euripides insists again and again that it is a most untrustworthy test. In the *Andromache* we read:

And many bastards far excel true sons. (638.)

In the *Electra* the same truth is put from the other side:

For many noble-born are base in soul. (551.)

In fact, it is much more difficult to judge of human nature than of anything else. Hence the exclamation in the *Medea*:

O Zeus, why hast thou given men a test
Of gold, to tell the counterfeit for sure,
But on the forms of men hast set no sign
By which we can distinguish who is vile? (516–19.)

Some internal standard is needed which will enable us to avoid mere appearance and get down to reality. Hence we find a frequent antithesis in Euripides between the *nominal* and the *real*, wherein lies the explanation of the contradictions just mentioned. It is stated baldly in the *Orestes*:

The name, but not the deed, of friends have they,
The friends that in misfortune are no friends.
(454–5.)

The same truism is put more paradoxically in the *Rhesus*, where the muse, who appears *ex machina*, absolves Odysseus and Diomedes from any guilt in the death of Rhesus, for which Athena was responsible:

> Nothing Odysseus, no, nor Tydeus' son,
> Has done in this, though theirs the hands that wrought;
> Athena is to blame. Right well I know. (938–40.)

Aristophanes, of course, makes no attempt to understand these paradoxes, being content simply to ridicule them, as, for example, in the *Acharnians*, 396:

> *Dicæopolis.* Euripides within?
> *Cephisophon.* Within and not within, if you can grasp
> My meaning.
> *Dic.* How within and not within? *Ceph.* Quite so,
> His mind is far abroad collecting poems,
> But he himself within, a tragedy
> Upstairs composes.[1] (Cf. *Frogs*, 1082; 1477.)

A trivial instance of this antithesis between the nominal and the real occurs in the *Orestes* (1604) in the distinction made between the pure in heart and the merely formally pure. Menelaus says that he is free from bloodguiltiness—his *hands* are pure—but Orestes replies that his *soul* is not. Similarly in the *Andromache*, when the nurse bids the remorse-stricken Hermione to cover up her bosom, she replies:

> To cover my breast O why do you bid?
> Uncovered and bare, that may not be hid,
> Is the deed I have done my spouse. (833–5.)

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[1] None of the commentators seems to have noticed the remarkable parallel between this fun and the description which Plato, in all seriousness, gives of the philosopher. In the *Theætetus* (173e) he writes: "In very truth it is only his body that is in the city and at hand, while his mind, regarding all these things [men's usual interests] as of little or no account, is borne along, as Pindar says, taking the measure of all things under and on the earth, and considering the stars beyond the heavens and searching out everywhere the whole nature of everything that is real, lending itself not at all to what lies near at hand."

In the *Iphigenia in Aulis* Achilles regards himself as morally responsible for the death of Iphigenia, who is to be sacrificed in order to placate the winds and so allow the Greek fleet to sail for Troy, seeing that she has been enticed to Aulis in expectation of marriage with him. He will not, he says, join in the plot against her, for if he did, though his hand might not lift the sword, his name would be the cause of her death. That Agamemnon was thus willing to sacrifice his own daughter was pleaded by Clytemnestra as a reason for her murder of him. By the same argument, as Euripides points out, Electra would have been justified in murdering Ægisthus, for by his treatment of her, Ægisthus might be said in a moral sense to have been the murderer of Electra much more truly than Agamemnon was of Iphigenia:

> For he it was who dealt me living death
> Far worse than slaying my sister. (*Electra*, 1092.)

For there is such a thing as moral death—worse than literal death—and Electra's life was such:

> Thou, sister, 'mong the departed art classed,
>   While I as dead as any shade
> The greater part of my life see passed
>   In groans and nightly tears—dismay'd.
> Unmarried I, without a child,
>   In wretched style live on for aye. (*Orestes*, 200–7.)

In all this Euripides shows a determination to look below the surface, to represent men—if we may adapt the remark of Sophocles—not as they seem to be, but as they are. We are in the moral sphere to which the Platonic antithesis between being and seeming belongs. Never is the contrast brought more vividly before our minds than when punctuated, as it were, by the half-line remarks of two disputants, as when Menelaus boasts to Orestes, in the passage just referred to, that his hands are free from the stain of blood, and Orestes replies "*But not thy soul.*" [1] This antithesis is fairly representative of the advance in moral teaching for which Euripides stands. It is comparable to a similar advance in metaphysical speculations which came about when material things were no longer regarded as the sole reality—an advance which had to work its way out through contradictions. Material things are so shifting that, as Heraclitus saw, so long as we keep our eyes fixed on them we have no stable criterion. Life becomes death, sleeping waking and age youth, as one of the fragments puts it. No Aristophanes seized upon this to turn it into ridicule, for metaphysics does not interest the spectators of a comedy, but it is exactly on a par with the ethical contradictions of Euripides, which all come from the antithesis between being and seeming, from substituting an internal for an external standard, for it is only when we pass from external to internal criteria that the ethical advance represented by such an antithesis becomes possible. On external sanctions, being and seeming are one. But not so in any moral code worthy of the name. The reader will remember how in the *Antigone* of Sophocles the edicts of Creon—against the burial of Antigone's brother—are set at naught by the dauntless sister, who justifies her conduct by an appeal to the unwritten laws of humanity, which though not ordained by man, are eternally binding upon every ideal human soul. Similar appeals are common in Euripides. In the *Phœnissæ*, for example, we have:

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[1] Cf. *Orestes*, 194.

*Creon.* How sayest? It is not right to do these hests?
*Antigone.* No—if they be bad hests, unjustly said.
(1648–9.)

but the most famous is where Theonöe says in the *Helen*:

There is a mighty shrine of Right, within
My soul. (1002–3.)

Here, then, is our discovery. Away with all external criteria—human nature in its ideal manifestations gives us the standard; each one of us is himself a living witness to what is right, for each of us has within himself a mighty temple of justice.

In its deepest sense this antithesis—between being and seeming—is a fundamental factor of all Greek tragedy, wherein human short-sightedness, or arrogant security, is contrasted with the eternal sanctions of moral right. Electra breaks out in this strain over the corpse of Ægisthus, who had connived at Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon and then taken the murderess to wife. He thought himself happy, but, as Electra says:

Thy life is wretched, though thou think'st it fair.
(*Electra*, 925.)

Amid all the external embellishments of the life of a Greek tyrant, Ægisthus might well have seemed blessed to the casual observer; but it is just this pomp and pride—as the story of Damocles and the sword reminds us—that forms the best illustration of the hollowness of external well-seeming:

The face of tyranny—so idly praised—
Is fair; but in its halls are grievous things.
Who can be blessed, or who happy styled,
Who lives his life in fear with sideward glance?
I would prefer a happy ploughman's life
To being a tyrant so, whose pleasure 'tis
To have the base for friends, and hate the good,
Because, forsooth, he fears the assassin's hand.
(*Ion*, 621–8.)

The seeming-prosperity of the wicked may puzzle the casual observer, but it presents no problem to one who sees the hollowness of it. As Electra says to Ægisthus:

> And this deceived thee most in ignorance—
> Trusting to wealth thou thought'st thyself a god.
> But wealth is naught, nor stays with us for long.
> What each man *is*, not what he has, one trusts.
> His character abides, and rears its head
> Alway; but unjust wealth lives with the vile,
> And, when its flower is o'er, speeds from the house.
> (*Electra*, 938–44.)

This difference between external and internal things is the difference which Hippolytus felt between the mere external form of words and that moral sanction which alone is really binding upon our souls, which caused him to give expression to the famous:

> My tongue has sworn; my soul is not constrained

—a remark which, in its context, is nothing but a recklessly sublime expression of idealism—that in ethics it is the spirit that counts, and not the letter of the law.[1] Mere formal conformity—external appear-

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[1] Aristophanes is, of course, unfair in parodying the line out of its context (*Thesm.* 275–6). As a matter of fact, Euripides replied to this malicious criticism, and Aristotle (*Rhetoric*, III. xv. 8) happens to record it. An Athenian of the name of Hygiænon challenged Euripides to an exchange of property, as the law allowed him to do, in connection with the alleged unfair incidence of liturgical duties upon himself and Euripides respectively. In the course of the trial he objected that no one could believe the oath of Euripides, who in his dramas openly recommended perjury. To this the poet replied that the wrong was on Hygiænon's part, for quoting in the law-courts words taken out of their context in a play, and that the words were justified in the play.

It is curious to note that no critic has thought that a very similar expression in Sophocles, to this notorious line in Euripides, stands in need of justification. The remark is not couched in such epigrammatic form, and therefore not so readily quoted apart from its context. Yet when Œdipus has, before telling the Chorus his name, extracted a promise from them not to force him to leave ance, that is to say—is of no value without the internal reality. In the *Hippolytus* itself there is frequent insistence upon this internal element of morality. Those only are chaste, we are told, who are so by nature, not by precept—a remark which reminds us of the Platonic contention that he alone is a just man who abstains from injustice owing to his own soul's divine hatred of it, and not because he has been taught to do so. Similarly in the *Bacchæ* we are told that self-control is a virtue ingrained in nature, not inspired by any external god:

> It is not Dionysus shall compel
> Women to self-control in Love. Their souls
> Must first approve it. (315–17.)

It is at this height of moral grandeur, and at this height alone, that we can understand why Euripides is so insistent that death, for example, is preferable

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sanctuary, there occurs, upon the revelation of his name, an exactly similar position, and when the Chorus bid him depart from their land, Œdipus very naturally asks, "*And what of your promise?*" to which the Chorus replies:

> "No man is visited by fate, if he requites deeds first done to himself, deceit on the one part matches deceit on the other, and gives pain instead of benefit for rewards."
>
> (*O. C.* 228–31, Jebb's translation.)

And Jebb's comment is: "Thou didst deceive us by getting our promise before telling thy name, we may requite thy deceit by deeming our promise void." Nor is this instance an isolated one in Sophocles. In the *Electra*, Orestes, in order to secure the success of his ruse, does not scruple to recommend deliberate perjury to the *pædagogus*:

> "Announce, and add thy oath, that by a fate
> Unavoidable, Orestes now is dead." (47–8.)

This, be it noted, is a calculated plot, thought out in cold blood with none of the excuse of momentary indignation, as in the case of Hippolytus. In fact it would be more difficult to justify, on ideal grounds, either of these two cases from Sophocles than the one more notorious example from Euripides.

to disgrace. When Polyxena is allotted to Odysseus as his concubine, according to the usual fate of captive women, she prefers death to disgraceful servitude, and bids her mother Hecuba not to oppose her resolution:

> Mother, hinder us not by word or deed,
> But join with me and counsel me to die,
> Before encountering shame that's undeserved.
> Whoso to taste of ill is not inured
> Is pained when on his neck the yoke descends,
> But he can bear it, and would rather die
> In happiness than live. For sore it is
> To live a life devoid of all that's fair.
>
> (*Hecuba*, 372–8.)

Death is a personal, individual thing; but the sanctions of morality are eternal and universal. This universality of moral law is strikingly insisted upon when, Hermione having in her jealousy taunted Andromache with her foreign origin:

> No foreign laws obtain within our city,

Andromache replies:

> In foreign land, as here, shame is but shame.
>
> (*Androm.* 244.)

The same high moral code is exhibited by Euripides not only in his conception of particular virtues, as opposed to the conventional Greek idea of them, but also in the underlying purpose of whole plays. We might instance the *Alcestis*, for example, as expounding a higher ideal of marriage than was current in Euripides' time,[1] or—to avoid controversial matter—the *Heracles* as expounding the highest ideals of friendship; but perhaps the *Troades* will afford the best example of all, for it is a play not without lessons for some "John Bullites" among us to-day. By taking as his subject the sufferings of the conquered, and by laying the scene at Troy, much as Æschylus in the *Persæ* laid the scene at Susa, there can be no doubt that Euripides intended some criticism of what we should now call the spirit of imperialism. This is obvious from the very beginning of the play, when Athena, although the traditional enemy of the Trojans, is now willing to help them because she hates the insolent pride of the Greeks:

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[1] See the article in *J. H. S.* (1917), by J. L. Myres.

> I wish to cheer the Trojans, once my foes,
> And give the Greeks a bitter home-return,
> (*Troades*, 65–6.)

is her explicit avowal, and a few lines later she gives her motive as the desire to improve the Greek moral and religious code:

> That henceforth Greeks may learn to pay respect
> Unto my shrines, and worship all the gods.
> (*Ibid.* 85–6.)

Nor is Athena alone in this. Poseidon concurs with her in her hatred of sacrilege, and warns us thus:

> A foolish mortal he who cities sacks,
> Temples and tombs to desolation turns,
> Himself to perish later. (*Ibid.* 95–7.)

When we remember that the *Troades* was produced in 415 B.C., in the year after imperial Athens had tried to teach the wretched Melians not to revolt from her hegemony by a wholesale massacre of the adult male population, we can see that there is much in the play to cause the Athenians to blush. But it is not until we come to the ravings of the inspired Cassandra that the purpose of the play is really pushed home. Then we are made to realise the true wretchedness of the conquerors and the blessedness of the conquered Trojans, who died for their country:

> This city will I show to be more blest
> Than are the Greeks. I rave in prophecy,
> But this much in my ravings I'll make clear.
> For they in striving to recapture Helen,
> One erring woman, have lost ten thousand men.
> And their wise general at the hands of foes
> Has lost his dearest joy—for brother's sake
> He has forgone the joys of home and children,
> All through a woman—and she not raped, but willing.
> And those who died upon Scamander's shores
> Came not because their boundaries were robbed,
> Nor high-placed citadel. They fell in fight,
> Saw not their children, nor were decked in robes
> By wifely hand, but in a foreign soil
> They lie. And things at home fared just as ill.
> Some widows were, some sonless in their halls,
> Who children reared to die at strangers' hands,
> With none to pour blood-offering on the ground
> Hard by their tombs. Fine eulogy is this!
> The deeds of shame 'tis best I leave unsaid,
> Never may muse of mine say evil words!
> The Trojans have the fairest fame, for they
> Died for their country. Those who fell in fight
> Friends carried home when dead, and laid to rest
> In their own native soil, in tombs heaped up,
> And decked them with their hands in seemly wise.
> And all those Trojans who escapèd death,
> With wife and children spent each happy day,
> While Greeks were strangers to such joys. Now hear
> The truth of Hector's sorry plight. For he
> Has gone to death proved bravest of all men.
> And this is wrought by coming of the Greeks;
> Were they at home, then had his prowess been
> All hidden in the dark.
>
> (*Ibid.* 365–97.)

Cassandra has a strong case, and she makes the most of it. But her idealism is quite incomprehensible to the stolid Talthybius, the messenger of the Greeks, who curtly bids her follow him to the ships:

> But as for thee—thy wits are surely strayed,—
> Thy praise of Troy and blame of Greeks the winds
> May take and scatter, but thou with me must go
> Unto the ships, the general's bride to be.
>
> (*Ibid.* 417–20.)

But to a finer soul than that of Talthybius Cassandra's standpoint is simply that of every idealist, to whom material prosperity is not the greatest thing in life. External goods, the goods of this world, have little to do with happiness, and Hecuba's great lament in this play is but a commentary upon the fleeting nature of the pomp of pride:

> A princess born I wed a prince, and brought
> Most noble children forth, no idle brood,
> But finest of the Trojans, such as no Greek
> Nor Trojan wife, nor foreigner could boast.
> And these I saw by Grecian spear laid low;
> These hairs I cut as offering to their tombs,
> And Priam, their sire, with mine own eyes I saw—
> No story heard from others for my tears—
> Butchered upon the homestead altar-stone,
> And Troy brought low. The daughters I had reared
> For princely wedding of most high renown,
> For others had I reared—all lost to me.
> No hope have I of being seen by them
> Or that I again shall ever see them more.
> And last of all, to cap my grievous woes,
> Old in years I shall come to Greece, a slave.
> And, what is most unseemly for my years,
> They will command me do—who Hector bore—
> To keep their keys as portress, bake their bread,
> And lie upon the ground with withered frame,
> That once was used to royal bed, with rags
> All soiled about my sullied flesh, unmeet
> For happy ones to wear. Alas for me!
> What have I suffered and what shall suffer yet
> Through that one marriage of one worthless woman?
>
> (*Ibid.* 474–99.)

In such a picture, perhaps, we are rather moved by pity for Hecuba in her fallen state, than brought to reflect upon the nothingness of what she has lost; but the very fact that she is such an inspiring character in her adversity, itself serves to illustrate the insignificance, in the moral sphere, of her losses compared with the treasures of her own character. If the whole of the *Troades* is a long, sustained lament upon the sorrows of the unfortunate, it is yet a glorious lament, and at the same time a commentary upon the fatuity of the glory of this world. It is to be noticed that only one of the unfortunate, Helen, who was responsible for the misery of all, is mentioned as being justly punished. Hecuba herself bids Menelaus to slay her:

> Now, Menelaüs, that you may know my drift,
> Slay her, as most becomes thyself, and crown
> All Greece with glory, and give to wives this rule—
> That who betrays her spouse shall surely die.
> (*Ibid.* 1029–32.)

Now contrast this glorious misfortune of the Trojans with the shameful arrogance of the successful Greeks. The shameless avowal of brute force put into the mouth of Talthybius, when he tells Andromache of the decision of the Greeks to slay her little boy:

> Thou must consider;
> Thy city and thy husband are destroyed;
> Thou art o'ercome, and we can fight against
> A single woman, (*Ibid.* 729–32.)

is obviously intended to bring a blush to the cheeks of the Athenians, and can hardly be missed when followed by such a scornful outburst as it draws from the mother:

> Go then and fetch him! Hurl him to his death,
> If you decree. Go, feed upon his flesh!
> (*Ibid.* 774–5.)

Later on we have the much-vaunted glory of the Greeks openly and scathingly described in the exclamation:

> O Greeks exceeding more in arms than soul!
> What new butchery have ye wrought in this
> From dread of a child? (*Ibid.* 1158–60.)

The object of all this is clearly to make us realise that moral distinctions transcend national ones, that our standard must be "the mighty shrine of Right" within us, and not unreflecting service to our country. All great art passes beyond national limitations, because all great art deals with man as man, and not as a member of this or that state. Euripides never tires of showing us how what is ideal transcends the customary code of conduct. Take, for example, the altercation between Theoclymenus and the servant in the *Helena*,[1] when Theoclymenus discovers the escape of Menelaus and Helen, brought about by the connivance of his sister, the priestess Theonöe, and is bent upon taking vengeance upon her. The servant opposes him:

*S.* Hi thou! Whither away, my master? To what slaughter, pray?
*T.* Where justice bids me go. Retire from out my way.
*S.* I will not loose thy robes. Thou art bent on working hell.
*T.* Wilt thou, a slave, control thy lord? *S.* Yea, I wish well.
*T.* Not to me, thus hindering. *S.* Me thou shalt not shun.
*T.* Let me kill that wicked sister. *S.* Not that holy one.
*T.* She who betrayèd me? *S.* And kept what's fair in sight.
*T.* And gave my love to others? *S.* To those who had more right.
*T.* Who has right o'er mine? *S.* Who received it from her sire.
*T.* But chance gave her to me. *S.* Justice does her require.
*T.* 'Tis not for thee to judge me. *S.* If right to me belong.
*T.* Slaves then, we have no power? *S.* Yea, right to do, not wrong.
*T.* You seem in love with death. *S.* Slay me; if I have might
Thou shalt not slay thy sister. For noble slaves delight
To meet e'en death, if so they shelter their own lords.
(1627–41.)

Each individual plea of Theoclymenus is answered by a more ideal plea on the part of the servant throughout. The slave is morally superior to the master. Social distinctions are not moral distinctions. These latter are paramount, and override even national divisions. So Hecuba, for instance, can approach Agamemnon, the greatest foe of her country, without fear, for she perceives that he is a man before he is a Greek:

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[1] I cannot agree with Haigh, *Tragic Drama of the Greeks*, p. 232, when he says, "such plays as the *Helena*, the *Phœnissæ* and the *Troades* have no pretensions to moral depth and grandeur, the sole aim of the poet, in these and similar works, being to entertain the audience by an effective series of striking situations."

> But surely do I count too much a foe
> His human heart, which is no foe at all?
> (*Hecuba*, 745–6.)

There is nothing very recondite in this—in the discovery that an "enemy" can be a friend, that a *hostis* is not necessarily *inimicus*—but it is worth insisting upon to-day, for we in England are not, as a nation, so willing to recognise it as we are to admit the more patent truths of the *Troades*, such as the criticism of the doctrine that might is right. Such lessons, we may imagine, needed insisting upon in the Athens of Euripides' day, when after the death of Pericles, the ochlocracy readily ran into excesses such as we may attain some idea of from the description in Thucydides of what happened at other places (e.g. Corcyra) than Athens. The Trojan captives may be physically weaker, but they are morally and spiritually stronger and finer, than their Greek captors. The latter may drag off their bodies into captivity but they cannot subdue their spirit: it is idle for force to attempt to control that[1]: it is strengthened, rather than weakened, by persecution—as witness the Roman persecutions of Christianity and the terrible but futile oppressions of the Spanish Inquisition.

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[1] Cf. Epictetus, passim.

# CHAPTER V

## THE POLITICS OF EURIPIDES

THE period covered by the dates of the production of the extant tragedies of Euripides roughly corresponds with the period of the Peloponnesian war. This is a momentous fact, which was not without its effect upon the poet's political ideas, not that his views are inspired by party-rancours, although he did entertain a very heart-felt hatred of the national enemy Sparta.[1] Nor is it so much that some plays, such as the *Suppliants*, the *Heracleidæ*, and the *Andromache*—actually produced at Argos—have an obviously political motive in their subjects or treatment.[2] Great art does not prostitute itself to the ephemeral interests even of a nation. A Greek tragedy was, in a very literal sense, a "competition of the moment"—as Thucydides says—in the theatre of Dionysus, but, beyond the hour of actual contest, it was no more so than the history of Thucydides himself, or than the work of any other great artist. Great literature deals with man as man, not as an Athenian or a Spartan, and it has nothing to do with national distinctions as such. When Euripides writes the *Troades*—a tragedy dealing exclusively with the miseries of the Trojans occasioned by their Greek conquerors—he makes us feel this much more strongly than Æschylus, for example, does in placing the scene of his *Persæ* at the court of Susa,[1] for the play of Æschylus serves really to throw up the glory of Athens in heightened contrast to the Persian defeat; but the *Troades* contains no word of Athenian glory, it rather emphasises the hollowness and unreality of it all. It shows us that blind following of one's country—that narrow patriotism which knows no higher standard than the interests of one's country—is no virtue, but a vice. There is no place for such false patriotism within the ideal realms of literature. Every great writer and every great artist is in some sense a cosmopolitan. He is a citizen of the great world of humanity in a far deeper sense than that in which he is a member of this or that state. Thus Euripides tells us that he finds a friend in every good or wise[2] man wherever he lives, even though it be in the uttermost parts of the earth:

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[1] Menelaus, a Spartan, plays a very odious part in the *Andromache*, and the indictment (445–53) of Andromache herself is appallingly bitter. The date of the play is not certain, but it was probably subsequent to the violation of the Peace of Nicias by the Spartans, as the scholiast (on l. 445) definitely asserts.

[2] In 418 the Argives broke away from the Athenian alliance and joined Sparta, though in the following year the democratic party renewed the alliance with Athens. Some critics connect the *Heracleidæ* with these events, but it was probably produced ten years earlier than this date, and is directed more against the Spartans than the Argives. The *Suppliants* certainly breathes a spirit of hatred of Thebes, who remained an enemy of Athens after Argos had become an ally. The *Andromache* would tend to cement this alliance.

> A wise man do I judge my friend, e'en though
> He dwells far off and never met my eyes. (*Frag.* 902.)

A noble-minded man is not, as such, of this land or of that:

> Every land is fatherland to noble men. (*Frag.* 1047.)

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[1] Æschylus was probably actuated by the artistic motive of getting a remoteness of *place* to make up for the usual remoteness of *time* in an ideal tragedy.

[2] The reading is doubtful.

Let no one think that Euripides was any the less of a good citizen on account of this.[1] His devotion to the higher ideal does not impair his devotion to Athens; it rather serves to enhance that devotion, and to purge from it all base elements of selfishness or narrow-mindedness. Athens, as object of his devotion, is what Thucydides called the "school of all Greece" and home of enlightenment. In one famous passage of the *Medea* the Athenians are blessed in that they cull the finest fruits of wisdom and walk delicately—the word denotes the nicety of culture—in realms where the nine Muses have brought forth a golden Harmony or Perfection of life.[2] Athens is over and over again designated by epithets that are not applicable in Greek to material prosperity, unless that prosperity is informed with the right moral and cultural dignity.

The plays of Euripides are full of examples of the devotion of the individual (especially of women) to the services of the state. The occasion of such sacrifice is often the unenlightened attitude of an oracle—of which Euripides would not approve—but the occasion is merely a dramatic pre-requisite, and that Euripides should have used it so frequently, in spite of his hatred of the ignorance which it bespeaks, is eloquent proof of his admiration of the devotion to country which he uses it to illustrate. We may mention the cases of Polyxena in the *Hecuba*,[1] of Iphigenia at Aulis, of Menœceus in the *Phœnissæ*, of Macaria in the *Heracleidæ*, and of Alcestis herself—all of whom are willing to lay down their lives, the last for her husband, but all the others for the good of their country. Their motives are of the most ideal nature. Listen to Iphigenia:

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[1] It is interesting to have the testimony of no less a person than Aristophanes for this, who in the *Frogs* represents Euripides as saying:

"I hate that man who to his country's help
Is slow, but swift to do her grievous harm" (1427–8.)

—an unsolicited testimonial, which was probably due to the fact that with regard to contemporary politics Euripides and Aristophanes were at one in their hatred of the Athenian war-party.

[2] 824–32. The Greek is equivocal and may equally well mean either that Harmonia gave birth to the nine Muses, or that the nine Muses gave birth to Harmony. I prefer, against the consensus of modern editors, to follow the scholiast who says: "Some people say that Euripides calls the Muses the daughters of Harmonia, but in this they are wrong. For he does not say this, but that the Muses when they first came to Attica made harmony and melody in singing. . . . In Athens the Muses are said to have given birth to and established the harmony of all wisdom."

> Come hither, mother, and consider here how well I say,
> The whole of mighty Greece now looks to me. This day
> Through me gives sailing to her fleet, and doom to Troy;
> It frees us from the fear of foreign rape, brings joy
> To wives in future, great happiness to him who marries,
> When once the penalty is paid for that rape of Paris.
> All this in dying shall I accomplish, and my renown,
> As having brought Greece freedom, shall be a glorious crown.
> Nor must I, loving life, like coward flee the fight;
> For Greece thou bearest me, not for thy sole delight.
>
> (*Iph. Aul.* 1377–86.)

We are the children of our country, and not only of our parents. Did we all but realise this, and direct our lives to forwarding the good of all, the lot of man would be a happier one, and political troubles would be less common. As Menœceus says:

> For if each man would take what good he has,
> And squander it upon the commonweal
> For country's sake, then would our states of ill
> Know less, and prosper well in years to come.
>
> (*Phœn.* 1015–18.)

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[1] Cf. Praxithea in *Frag.* 362—especially ll. 53–5:

> "O Fatherland, I would that all your folk
> Bore you the love I do, then happily
> Should we inhabit you, and you be glad."

Devotion to such an ideal is the finest form of self-realisation. He that loses his life shall find it, as is the conviction of Macaria in the *Heracleidæ*; so that she faces death unmoved:

> My soul is ready of its own accord
> Quite unconstrained. And I shall win renown
> By dying for sake of brothers and myself.
> For, not loving life o'ermuch, a find I've made
> That is right fair—most gloriously to die. (530–4.)

No man can help loving his country. Polynices, who has made his way through the foes surrounding Thebes, and come for that last clandestine meeting with Eteocles, which his mother had arranged in the forlorn hope of reconciling the brothers, tells us so; and there is a peculiar weight in his words, spoken, as they are, amid such tragic circumstances:

> Mother, with unwise wisdom have I come
> To hostile men. Our fatherland we all
> Must love, and whosoe'er says otherwise
> Makes game with words—his heart is otherwhere.
> (*Phœn.* 357–60.)

To be deprived of his native land is the greatest misfortune man can suffer,[1] so great that the exile yearns for it all his days and visits it again in his dreams.[2]

If this is the tone of the political views to which Euripides gives expression, we shall not expect to find in his plays any evidence of a narrow spirit of patriotism. What we meant by saying that his living through the greater part of the Peloponnesian war (he was spared the end) had profoundly influenced his ideas on politics, was not that he was inspired by any partisan spirit, but that he had taken to heart the *lessons* of that war. When Attica was annually invaded by the Spartans, her territory ravaged and her crops destroyed, while the Athenians were crowded in their city, confined to its walls, there would be time to reflect upon the importance of the agricultural class to the state. This class bitterly resented its losses, and their complaints are frequently heard in the comedies of Aristophanes, but it is left to Euripides to draw the deeper moral and insist upon how essential to the whole community is this particular class. Euripides reminds us of the Roman poet, Virgil, in his untiring admiration for the hardy, rustic virtues of the agricultural class. In the debate at Argos, upon the fate of Electra and Orestes, he thus describes a simple-minded yeoman, who stood up to speak:

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[1] *Medea*, 461–3; *Phœn.* 387–9.

[2] *Iph. Taur.* 452–5; 1137 ff.

> Another then sprang up, and spoke against,
> No comely man to view, but of brave heart;
> One rarely in the town or market-close,
> A tiller of the soil—sole hope of the land—
> A man of sense, who freely spoke his mind,
> Without a flaw, and lived a blameless life.
>
> (*Orestes*, 917–22.)

and he would hardly have represented Electra, in the play of that name, as married to a farmer, if he had not had the profoundest respect for that class. They are the backbone of the country—sole hope of the land—no less than the "middle classes" are the backbone of the state in its more political aspect:

> Of citizens there are three sets: the rich,
> No use, and ever longing to gain more;
> And then the poor, who lack a livelihood,
> And, grim themselves, to envy are inclined,
> And in the rich do set their evil stings,
> Deceived by tongue of leaders steeped in guile.
> Of these three sets the midmost save the state,
> Obeying the law, whate'er the state enact.
>
> (*Suppl.* 238–45.)

This last is a truth which must have been brought home to Euripides in a fearful manner by the excesses of faction which broke out to such an alarming extent all over Greece, by which, as Thucydides tells us, almost the whole Greek world was overturned. It is difficult for us to realise the awful nature of these excesses, but Thucydides has left us a most terrible account of them, more terrible, perhaps, in its dry precision than in its actual details.[1] He tells us that almost the whole Hellenic world was divided into two hostile camps: in every city the oligarchs strove to ally themselves with Sparta, and the democratic party looked to Athens for help, and now one, now the other, party gained the upper hand and exacted terrible vengeance from its opponents, each trying to outdo the excesses of the other. The man who could anticipate his neighbour in evil-doing was held in respect: it was a finer thing to take vengeance upon another than to avoid suffering oneself; complicity in evil was the only trustworthy bond between man and his fellows; religion and oaths lost their sanctity; the very words of everyday speech took on a new significance, reckless folly becoming loyal courage and the caution of foresight the specious excuse of cowardice; men took more pride in a treacherous victory over the unsuspecting than in a clean fight against an avowed enemy, for it involved the additional merit of having outwitted one's opponent, and most men preferred to be called clever rogues rather than honest, but simple, men; so they pursued their vengeance with no thought for the good of the state, but only for their own personal profit, which set no limit to their excesses.

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[1] Book III. ch. lxxxii.

The result was that the "moderate" party was simply wiped out from every state—"The middle class of the citizens was put to the sword by both parties, either because it would not take sides, or from mere envy of its survival." What awful facts lie concealed within this brief remark! The cutting out of the backbone of the state—the "sole hope of the land." Such faction was indeed a fearful calamity, the far-reaching results of which are thus summarised by Thucydides:

> Thus every form of calamity befell the Greek world owing to faction; and simplicity, which is the larger part of nobility, was laughed out of existence, but distrustful opposition to one's fellows spread far and wide. For there was no sanction in words, nor respect for oaths to put an end to strife. Men reckoned their strength according to their conviction of the insecurity of things, and were rather concerned to forestall evil than able to trust others. And as a rule the inferior prevailed. For conscious of their own defects and their adversaries' ability, for fear of being defeated in argument or outstripped in the contrivance of evil, they took boldly to action. But the better sort superciliously thinking to be in time and disdaining action where thought would serve, were taken off their guard and destroyed. (iii. 83.)

No other lesson of the Peloponnesian war had more to teach the political thinker than this elimination of the "moderates" which such faction produced, and there can be no doubt that Euripides was profoundly influenced by such a spectacle.

Again, would not the fickleness of the Athenian ecclesia, as shown, for example, in its belated repentance concerning the fate of the Mytileneans, cause him to distrust democracy? The reader will remember that the Athenians first decided to punish the revolt of Mytilene by putting the whole male population of military age to the sword and selling the women and children into slavery, that they then held a second assembly in which Cleon counselled them to abide by their previous decision, but the more humane counsel of Diodotus barely prevailed, and they dispatched a second trireme in haste after the first to cancel the inhuman decree. The rowers toiled night and day at the oars by shifts, for the first trireme had had twenty-four hours' start. The Mytileneans in Athens promised great rewards to the oarsmen if they should succeed in overtaking the first boat, and provided them with concentrated food of wine and barley which they could take without ceasing to row. They arrived just in time, and the massacre was prevented.[1] But it was a never-to-be-forgotten illustration of the fickleness of democracy. With such things going on around him, it is not surprising that Euripides could not trust democracy. He knew too well that the mob-conscience is a low one:

Know, then, that in a countless host
The mob is unrestrained; the seamen's licence
Is worse than fire, and he who does no harm
Is held an evil man. (*Hecuba*, 606–8.)

But he recognises that the heart of the people is good, in spite of its proneness to give way to passion:

The people's wrath when fresh and strong, once moved
Is like a blazing furnace to assuage.
But if one quietly slackens reins drawn tight,
And watches well the time, one may avail.
And, when its wrath is spent, you oft can get
Whate'er you wish from it, right easily.
For it knows pity; and its soul is great—
Which is a priceless boon on which to light.
(*Orestes*, 696–703.)

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[1] Thuc. iii. 49.

That the heart of the people is good is shown very beautifully in the behaviour of the crowd after the sacrifice of Polyxena in the *Hecuba*:

> Some with their hands threw leaves upon her corpse,
> Others built up the pyre with logs of fir.
> And he who carried naught, from him who did
> Heard words of chiding such as these: "How now,
> Wretch, idling dost thou stand, without or robe
> Or other thing to deck the maid, in hand?
> Hast naught to give to this too fearless one
> With soul so noble?" (573–80.)

But the trouble, of course, is that the intelligence of the mob is not as sound as its heart. Its judgment is undiscerning, and it is easily influenced by good or evil counsellors. As Orestes says:

> A terrible thing, whene'er the leaders of the folk are bad.

To which Pylades replies:

> But when they take good leaders, then they counsel well.
> (*Orestes*, 772–3.)

Another passage in the *Orestes* is to the same effect:

> For if smooth words, but ill intent, prevail
> Upon the crowd, the state incurs great ill.
> But those who from their wisdom counsel well,
> Though not at first, yet in the end, do most
> To serve their country. (907–11.)

In the *Suppliants* one of the advantages which the Theban herald attributes to his own, oligarchic, government is just this freedom from unwholesome influence:

> The city whence I come
> By one man, not by any mob, is ruled.
> Nor can one, fawning on it with fine words,
> Sway it now here, now there, to one's own gain
> With acclamation and much favour now,
> Though soon to work it harm; then by new guile
> Blame others for one's fault, and justice flee.
> How can the mob, that reasons all amiss,
> Expect to govern cities as is right? (408–18.)

The end of the ill-fated Sicilian expedition showed what the "seamen's licence" of Athenian democracy could lead to, and the careers of men like Alcibiades, Cleon and Cleophon were not calculated to inspire Euripides with any respect for demagogues. In the extant plays they are spoken of with an intensity of hatred which is shown to no other class save that of the soothsayers and oracle-mongers. The demagogue who rises to speak at the Argive debate upon the fates of Orestes and Electra is thus described in the *Orestes*:

> A man with tripping tongue, and bold as brass,
> An Argive yet no Argive, forced on them,
> Relying on noise and licence ignorant,
> Still plausible to bring the folk to harm. (903–6.)

and Hecuba, in the play of that name, says very bitter things about them to Odysseus:

> A graceless brood are ye, who from the mob
> Seek favours. Never may I know your kind,
> Who care not for the harm you do to friends,
> Provided that the crowd acclaim your words. (254–7.)

The crowning fault of democracy—as Euripides at least knew it—is its lack of recognition of real merit. We read in the *Hecuba*:

> Most of our states in this fare ill—for that
> A good and zealous citizen doth reap
> No greater guerdon than the base do win. (306–8.)

But without worthy citizens there can be no worthy state, and if the leaders of the people are to have the right influence upon the heart of the mob, which is in itself sound, they must themselves be good men. Good birth helps to virtue, and the state needs virtue:

> A clear impress, not to be missed, in men
> Is good descent, and fame of noble birth
> Is greater still in those of sterling worth. (*Ibid.* 379–81.)

Such, we may conjecture, were the lessons which a thinker of the stamp of Euripides must have drawn from the Peloponnesian war. But, above all, he derived from it a profound hatred of war itself. In nothing was he more opposed in spirit to his great predecessor, Æschylus, than in his attitude to the supposed glory of war. Æschylus presents us with an heroic glorification of military prowess: his boast in the *Frogs* is that he represented men, not as Euripides did,

> But breathing spears and swords and white-plumed helmets
> And casques and greaves and the spirit of seventy bulls;
> (1016–17.)

and there could be no greater contrast than that between his *Seven against Thebes* and the *Suppliants* of Euripides, where Adrastus pronounces funeral orations over the bodies of the fallen chieftains, but praises them for virtues very different from those of military prowess.[1] Who is ignorant, asks Tacitus,[2] that it is better to enjoy peace than to be troubled by war? and the herald of the *Suppliants* forestalls him:

> And yet of these two choices all mankind
> Doth know the better. We can distinguish good
> From bad, and know that peace is better far
> Than war. For peace is dear unto the Muses,
> And hates Revenge, but in fair children joys,
> And in prosperity. Yet evil men
> Do raise up wars; strong make the weak their slaves,
> And as do men, so city does to city. (486–93.)

The spectator who witnessed a performance of the *Troades* would find his soul turn against the patriotic enthusiasm of the Athenian war-party, especially as the Melian massacres would be fresh in his memory.

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[1] See p. 158.

[2] *De Oratoribus*, 37.

The *Suppliants*, apart from its strange funeral orations, witnesses the same detestation of all that has to do with war. Listen to the words of Theseus addressed to the suppliant Adrastus:

Thou, putting all the Argives in the field
In spite of priestly prophecies, didst work
Outrage to gods, and bring thy town to ruin,
Being led astray by youths, who find their joy
In glory, and wars unjustly heap on wars
To bane of citizens; one from the lust
Of leading men, another from sheer greed
Of power, and others seeking private gain
Without regard for aught the folk may suffer. (229–37.)

Greece is "war-maddened," and no man thinks of the horrors which war entails:

Great evil expectation is for men,
Which, by unduly raising up their spirits,
Has often sent out states to war. For when
A vote is taken, no one thinks of death
Himself—that mishap is for others kept—
But if Death stood before our eyes, when votes
Were cast, war-maddened Greece had perished not.
(*Ibid.* 479–85.)

There is an exceptionally modern ring about the conviction that there will be no peace in the world, so long as men look to arms as the arbiter of their disputes:

Fools seeking virtue put their trust
In War, and in the spear's hard thrust;
And idly thus seek some relief
From mortal troubles—ah how brief!
For, if ever war is to settle things,
Strife stays with us: no peace it brings.
(*Helena*, 115–17.)

Arbitration must take the place of war, though existing states do little to realise such an ideal:

Ye states, that could by parley end your feuds,
Choose blood, not reason, as your arbitress.
(*Suppl.* 748–9.)

An idea so modern as this, so alien from the spirit of his own times, reminds us very forcibly that Euripides was a thinker whose views, whether on politics or on any other subject, will repay close study. The superficial facts of his political outlook—that he hated tyranny, or hated demagogues—may be interesting enough in themselves, but we do not realise their full significance until we discern the reasons that underlie them—until we pass, as Aristotle would say, from the mere fact to the illuminating reason. We then come to see that he hated tyranny because he hated brute force. Eteocles in the *Phœnissæ* is the typical tyrant. He will go to hell to win power, and on no account will yield it to another. As he himself says:

> I would climb the stars and mount the rising sun,
> Or go beneath the earth—an that I could—
> To win the greatest goddess—Tyranny.
> This good, my mother, I will not let go
> From out my hand, and give it to another.
> A coward is he who loses aye the first,
> And takes the second, best. (504–10.)

So he decides to let war do its worst. Injustice in such a case is no injustice; might is right:

> And so let fire blaze out; let loose the sword.
> Yoke up your steeds; let chariots fill the plains,
> For never will I yield my Power to him.
> If wrong must be, then wrong for kingdom's sake
> Is best—though piety in all else is well. (*Ibid.* 531–5.)

Here we get Euripides' real objection to tyranny—that it knows no law but the will of the tyrant:

> Nothing is worse than tyranny for states,
> For then there is no common law. One man
> O'errides the law, and sways all things himself,
> And equity is banished from the land. (*Suppl.* 429–32.)

Elsewhere he calls it a happy injustice, the source of many wrongs. It is a form of government under which no state can prosper:

> How may a city win to powerfulness
> If one deprive it of all daring souls,
> Cut down the young like corn afield in spring?
> What boots it for our sons to heap up wealth,
> Wherewith some tyrant may enrich his life?
> Or train our daughters well at home, that they
> May bring sweet joys to tyrants at their will
> And tears to parents? (*Ibid.* 447–54.)

Its whole attitude to life is fundamentally wrong: it has to find its friends among the base, and the advantages which its wealth brings it are no compensation for the greater "goods" to which it is a stranger. The young Ion, in the play of that name, would rather be a humble tiller of the soil than a tyrant:

> The face of tyranny—so idly praised—
> Is fair; but in its halls are grievous things.
> Who can be blessed, or who happy styled,
> Who lives his life in fear with sideward glance?
> I would prefer a happy ploughman's life
> To being a tyrant so, whose pleasure 'tis
> To have the base for friends, and hate the good,
> Because, forsooth, he fears the assassin's hand.
> Thou sayest, perhaps, that gold makes up for this,
> For wealth is pleasant? I would not choose to hold
> Such wealth within my hands, and bear its toils,
> And bear an evil name. Let mine be mean
> But painless substance. (621–32.)

From passages such as these we see that Euripides' hatred of tyranny was a moral, as well as a political, hatred. The life of the tyrant gives the lie to what Euripides held to be the greatest truths of life. It turns the right scale of the "goods" of our life—formulated by Aristotle as external goods, goods of the body, and goods of the soul—quite upside-down, and so is opposed, not only to his idea of the communal good, but also to his conception of "the good for man" itself. Nor does it take much insight to see that his hatred of demagogues is the product, not of any ephemeral party-feeling, but of a sincere conviction of the dangers that lie in the non-moral, or immoral, use of the powers of rhetoric. Euripides is second only to Plato in his profound distrust of this "worker of persuasion." [1] Many passages attest this. Truth is to be gained by quiet search in the closet, not by noisy declamation in the market-place—a fact which Hippolytus applies to his own case when the tablets of Phædra seem to have convicted him of unspeakable crime, and his own ideal nature is unwilling, or unable, to clear itself at Phædra's expense. He says:

> I am unskilled to move the crowd in speech;
> My age-mates and the few find me more wise;
> Which is but right. For those of no account
> In Wisdom's eyes, are cultured to the mob.
> (*Hipp*. 986–9.)

Like the philosopher in Plato's *Republic*, the man of refinement does not shine in public. Those who can make a fine show of words are, as often as not, villains at heart. As Medea says to Jason:

> I hold him most to blame who, being vile,
> Has skill to cloak his sin in wisdom's words;
> For thinking thus to deck injustice out
> With words, he dares all wickedness. But then
> His wisdom is at fault. So do not show
> Thyself a fair and clever talker now. (*Medea*, 580–5.)

The persuasion of fine-speaking is a dread power, which the Chorus of the *Troades*, when Helen has pleaded so powerfully to Menelaus to spare her life, bids Hecuba overcome:

> Queen, defend thy children and thy land!
> Destroy her too-persuasive tongue! She speaks
> So fair and is so vile—a thing to shun. (966–9.)

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[1] See below, pp. 141–2.

Similarly the hatred of Sparta, to which Andromache gives such bitter expression in the lines:

O ye most hateful to all men on earth,
Dwellers in Sparta, tricky counsellors,
Kings of deceit, crafty devisers of ill,
Unwholesome twisters, thinking out some plot,
Unjustly do you prosper in this land.
What evil is strange to you? What murder not
Contrived? And you, base seekers after gain,
Are proved for aye saying this, but meaning that.
(*Androm.* 445–52.)

springs from a source deeper than that of political feeling. In spite of references to peculiarly Spartan institutions, such as the double kingship, Euripides—we cannot help feeling—is moved throughout not so much by sharing in the public hatred of the national enemy, as by his own personal hatred of Sparta as the type of a cultureless ideal, the worshipper of "gymnastic" torn ruthlessly away from its complement "music"—which is in itself the lovelier half of the Greek ideal. One line of the *Supplices*:

Sparta is crude and undefined at heart, (187.)

puts this beyond doubt, for the epithet *crude* denotes insensibility to the finer things of life. We need not labour the point, for it is sufficiently obvious, on general grounds, that the Spartan ideal would not be one to appeal to a man of Euripides' stamp of mind, but it is worth noting in this connection that the poet had a great contempt for professional athletes. A fragment of the *Autolycus* describes them as strangers to culture, slaves to their bellies, and the bane of Greece:

Of all the myriad ills in Greece, the race
Of athletes is the worst. For they know not how
To live the cultured life, nor could they if
They would. Slave of his belly, how could such

> Fare better than his sire? How bear poverty
> And ply the oar with fortune? Such characters
> Ill brook the scowls of fortune, spite of all
> Their brilliant youth, the city's joy. For when
> Grievous old age comes on, they shed their finery.
> I blame the custom of the Greeks, who make
> A gathering for such as these, and feast
> And honour useless joys. Has wrestling man
> Or runner or skilled thrower of the quoit,
> Or famous boxer helped his native town
> By winning prizes? Do men fight the enemy
> With quoits, or cast them from the land
> By blow of foot? No one in battle-line
> Thus drivels. We ought to crown the wise and good
> With garlands, and the man who guides his city
> With wisest counsel and is himself right just,
> And him who, with his tales, of evil rids
> The city, banishing war and faction.
> Such things are fair to us, and to the world.

His father, we are told, misreading an oracle which promised his success in the contests, once destined Euripides himself for this profession, so he is likely to have known the class of which he speaks fairly well.

So, too, the hatred of ochlocracy or the baser forms of democracy—which we have noted—must be traced to a hatred of ignorance and of personal aggrandisement. If we study the different types of politicians who are represented by the speakers in the Argive debate (already mentioned) about the fate of Electra and her brother in *Orestes*, 887–952, we shall get a very fair idea of Euripides' political standpoint, just as we get a good idea of his conception of human ideals from the funeral orations spoken by Adrastus in the *Supplices*,[1] and in that debate we have first a herald flattering those in power, next Diomedes suggesting the compromise of exile, then a full-blown demagogue with his evil counsel, followed by a sturdy yeoman

> Without a flaw, who lived a blameless life, (*Orestes*, 922.)

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[1] See below, p. 158.

who proposes that Orestes should be publicly crowned for having dared to avenge his father, and honest men approved of him:

> To all the good he seemed to speak right well. (*Ibid.* 930.)

It is like Socrates in the *Apology* of Plato assessing his penalty at public support by the state for the rest of his life! That Euripides' political views were the outcome of no superficial interest in the politics—as we understand the word—of his day, but rather of a deep philosophical concern with affairs of state, is abundantly proved by his attitude to the problems involved in the institution of slavery and the position of women in society. Herein lie two of the greatest deficiencies of ancient civilisation, and it speaks well for the poet's political insight that he was able to put his finger upon both of them.[1] Plays such as the *Medea* and the *Alcestis* reflect a social conscience that was fully alive to the defects of the marriage institutions of contemporary Athens, but consciousness of the political atmosphere of his day is not confined to any particular problems, it is reflected throughout his plays in the tacit recognition that society is very different from what it was in the days, for example, of Æschylus. This is best illustrated by his attitude to high birth, which, as we said in our opening remarks, is no longer regarded as the sole criterion of virtue. A man's own merit, and not that of his ancestors, is his only title to respect. Euripides is not blind to the aristocratic virtues, but they avail nothing if personal worth is absent—by their own characters must we judge even the well-born, and a man of base birth is not necessarily an evil man. These sentiments are almost platitudes to-day, after our centuries of democracy, but they were by no means self-obvious axioms when Euripides gave expression to them over two thousand years ago.

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[1] For his attitude to women see the chapter on "Defence of Women," and for slavery, pp. 115–21 of the chapter on "Humanism."

# CHAPTER VI

## HIS HUMANITY AND HIS HUMANISM

By the humanity of Euripides, I mean his sympathy with the ordinary feelings of mankind; by his humanism, I mean something, not qualitatively different, but more philosophically envisaged as part of a system in which a pre-eminent significance is allotted to such humanity. Of the two we will first consider the simpler.

That Euripides had great sympathy with the ordinary feelings of mankind, scarcely needs illustration. It is a quality as all-pervading with him as the serenity of Sophocles or the grandeur of Æschylus. But two aspects of this sympathy, as shown in his treatment of two classes of society, namely, children and slaves, are so peculiar to him, as distinguished alike from his great predecessor and from his great contemporary, that they deserve separate consideration.

### (*a*) *Children in Euripides*

In nothing is Euripides so modern as in his representation of children. The Greeks of the classical age took no delight in the artistic representation of child-life. They seem to have found something bizarre in that immaturity of children which to us has a certain charm. The history of Greek sculpture is a good illustration of this fact, for it is not until the age of Boethus that children come to be modelled alone, as, for example, in the well-known "Boy with a Goose." They do occur previously, though not by themselves, as in the case of the infant Dionysus held by the Hermes of Praxiteles or the symbolical figure of Plutus in the arms of the Eirene of Cephisodotus, but they are scarcely children, for they have not even the limbs of childhood. They are little replicas of man—almost grotesque little manikins. And it is the same in every branch of Greek art, literature included. They never appear, for example, in Æschylus, and there is only one instance—and that a *muta persona*—in Sophocles.[1] How different is the case of Euripides! Not only do they appear frequently upon his stage, both in groups—as in the *Heracles*, the *Heracleidæ*, and the *Medea*—and singly—as the young Astyanax in the *Troades*,—but they take speaking parts and by so doing add tremendously to the effect of their pathetic situations. So far is Euripides from feeling that there is anything bizarre about them, that they have become almost everything to him. They are the very life and soul of man; he who is childless may be saved much trouble, but he is unfortunate in his "happiness":

> To all men children are the soul of life.
> And he who, knowing them not, doth disapprove,
> Has trouble less, but his happiness lacks joy.
> (*Androm*. 418–20.)

A fragment, which has survived from some lost play, represents the sight of children in the house as the fairest sight in the world:

> Woman, dear is this sunlight, fair the sea
> Unruffled by the wind, and the earth in spring
> All burgeoning with wealth of streams, and many

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[1] The young Eurysaces in the *Ajax*.

Are the things of beauty deserving praise of me.
But nothing is so bright and fair to see
As fruit of children in their homes, for those
Who have been childless, and felt the yearning want.

From a spectacular point of view nothing could be more effective than the group presented by the children of Heracles crouching along with Megara, their mother, around the altar of Zeus the Saviour, at the opening of the *Heracles*, wondering when their father will return. The mother speaks:

Both thou and I are like to die, old man,
With these the children here of Heracles,
Whom I protect, like mother-bird her chicks
Beneath her wings. But they do ask now this,
Now that—"O mother! where has father gone?
What is he doing? When will he come?" And so
They seek their sire in childishness forlorn,
And I do put them off with stories feigned.
Yet if the door but creak, all to their feet
Do start in wonder, quite prepared to fall
On father's knees. (70–79.)

Their presence follows us throughout the tragedy. The Chorus comments upon their physical likeness to their sire and upon their hard lot in being involved in his misfortunes:

   See, how like their sire
Blazing from the children's eyes
   Is the flash as of ire!
And his misfortune never dies,
Down their young lives it paces.
Nor perished are his manly graces.
   O Greece, in these what a loss,
   If they should die, wilt thou come across!
(*Ibid.* 130–7.)

When Heracles does return their joy is dumb, but most expressive. They cling to his garments and will not leave go, so that he has to chide them with tender rebukes:

Let go my robes,
I am no bird, and will not flee my friends.
Ha!
They will not let me go, but clasp my robes
So much the more. Was it so near a thing?
I will take and tow them by the hand, as ship
Does lighter craft. I don't disdain to care
For these my children. All men in this do share:
The better and the worse their offspring love.
(*Ibid.* 627–34.)

In the *Medea* the blandishments of her children prove, at one moment, too much for the stern heart of the Colchian woman, and she cannot fulfil her dread intent:

Alas! Alas! why gaze your eyes upon me?
Why smile, my children, with this latest smile?
Ah! what shall I do? I cannot steel my heart,
As I look upon the bright eyes of my babes.
I will not do it. Farewell, designs of yore!
I will take my children from the land. What need
Myself to reap a double dose of ills,
That sire of theirs may grieve at their distress?
I will not do it. Farewell, designs of yore! (1040–8.)

Though Medea does finally steel her heart, there is real tenderness—as the reader may remember—in her words of farewell:

Oh dearest hand! Oh dearest lips to me!
Oh children's form, and face of noble birth!
May you be happy—but not here. Your sire
Has ta'en that quite away. Oh sweet embrace!
Oh tender flesh and sweetest breath of babes!
Farewell! Farewell! No longer can I look
At you. Evil o'ercomes me. And I know
How great an evil I intend to do.
But passion overcometh my desires,
And this is cause of greatest ill to men. (*Ibid.* 1071–80.)

The boy who speaks in the *Alcestis* shows a keen realisation of what it means to a child to lose its mother:

O my unhappy lot! Mammy has gone beneath the earth.
  O father, father! She no longer sees the sun.
I am an orphan. She has left me. O the dearth
  That it has made of all my life! O wretched one!

Look! Look at her eyelids! See her hands outstretched!
Hear, mother, O hear the prayer from my heart I've fetched!
It is I that am calling, thy own little nestling,
O hear me, dear mother! on thy lips as I cling. (393–403.)

And the sons whose lamentations are interwoven with those of the Chorus in the *Suppliants* (1123–64) know what it means to have lost their fathers. The only note of hope in their desolate condition is the thought that they may some day grow to manhood and become their avengers. In the same spirit, but with a more tender touch, the old Peleus in the *Andromache* bids the young Molossus help him to unbind his mother. Some day he shall avenge her:

Creep hither, child, beneath my arms!
Help loose thy mother's bonds! In Phthia yet
I'll bring thee up, an enemy to them. (722–4.)

He would not be likely to forget what he had shared with her, and Euripides makes us realise this by means of a most moving dialogue between the mother and the young boy:

*Androm*. With bloody wrists in bonds enfurled
I am sent unto the under-world!
*Boy*. O mother, mother! And I with thee
Beneath thy wing do thither flee.
*Androm*. O land of Phthia, what a butchery hast made!
*Boy*. O father, come! thy friends to aid.
*Androm*. There, child, upon thy mother's breast,
A corpse on corpse, thou shalt find rest.
*Boy*. What things I suffer! Alas for me!
And thou too, mother. Alas for thee!
*Menelaus* [*entering*]. Down to the under-world! You hie
From hostile towers. The votes are twain
Against your lives. Thyself must die
By mine. Hermione's hath slain
The boy. 'Twere madness to let rear
Offspring of foes, when the chance is near
To slay, and rid one's house of fear.
*Androm*. O husband, husband! Would that thou
Wert here with spear to aid me now!

*Boy.* Alas! Alas! What strain can I find
To avert this fate and cast it behind?
*Androm.* Clasp his knees, O child, in prayer!
*Boy.* Friend! O Friend, I pray thee, spare! (501–31.)

Against the heart of Menelaus all this avails nothing. He had enticed Andromache away from the altar, at which she had taken refuge, by threatening to kill the young boy, unless she came. The mother gave her life for her son's, only to find herself treacherously betrayed. She is to die herself by condemnation of Menelaus, and the boy's life is claimed by Hermione. Vengeance thus taken, or planned, upon a young life has something peculiarly pathetic about it. We are reminded of the fate of Astyanax in the *Troades*, whom the Greeks decide must be hurled from the battlements of Troy that he may not live to avenge his country. He is torn away from his mother, and when the unspeakable deed has been done, Talthybius brings the little corpse, laid on Hector's shield, back to Hecuba, who pours out her grief upon it—dwelling with loving sorrow upon all the details of his young form and tender life:

Lay Hector's rounded shield down on the ground—
A grievous sight that I care not to see.
O Greeks exceeding more in arms than soul,
What new butchery have ye wrought in this
From dread of a child? So you were nothing worth
When Hector prospered in the fight, and we
Died fighting in our thousands? But now that Troy
Is captured, and the Trojans slain, you fear
This little child? I cannot praise such dread
Which feareth when there is no ground of fear.
O dearest child, how wretched is thy death!
If thou hadst died for country, full of youth,
Enjoying a wife and heaven-blest tyranny,
Thou hadst been happy—if happiness lies there.[1]

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[1] Very natural words in the mouth of Hecuba, a foreigner. But Euripides, the Athenian, cannot, even here, forbear to comment and to question the happiness of the tyrant. See above, p. 102.

But as it is, these joys thy childish soul
Has scarcely known. Thy halls for thee hold naught.
O Luckless one! how ill thy native walls,
The towers of Loxias, have torn thy curls,
That oft thy mother fondled and gave kisses.
Whence now there grins through broken bones foul death,
A sight unspeakable. O hands so like
Thy father's, how loose you lie unjointed now!
What many vaunts those loving lips did make!
Thou art gone; gone too, what bounding on my couch
Didst say, "O mother, full many a lock for thee
I'll shear, and crowds of friends lead to thy tomb,
And say dear words of parting." Not thou me
Dost bury now, but, old and childless, I,
Without a home, do wail thy tender corse.
O many kisses and my nursing-care
For naught! O lovely lips! All gone! What now
Can bard engrave upon thy tomb, but this:
*This child the Argives once in fear did slay—*
An epitaph that's full of shame for Greece.
But, though thou hast not aught thy father had,
Yet shalt thou have his brazen shield for tomb.
(*Troades*, 1156–93.)

Apart from Euripides and some passages in Homer—such as the scene between Hector and Andromache—there is nothing like this—in its appreciation of the appeal of childhood—to be found in ancient literature, until we come to Catullus, who can write:

Torquatus uolo paruulus
  matris e gremio suae
  porrigens teneras manus
Dulce rideat ad patrem
  semihiante labello.

Sit suo similis patri
  Manlio et facile insciis
  noscitetur ab omnibus,
Et pudicitiam suae
  matris indicet ore. (lxi. 209–18.)

## (*b*) *Slaves*

Greek society rested upon a basis of slavery; the ideal of leisure which we admire so much in Athenian culture was possible only because it was the product of a society in which the existence of slavery was taken for granted. Probably the average Athenian was little troubled about the justice or otherwise of compelling another human being to devote his life to the performance of menial duties in order that he himself might have the opportunity of living a more cultured life; but philosophers could not escape reflection upon an institution which was so necessary a pre-requisite for the whole ideal of the Greek city-state. Thus we find Aristotle undertaking a reasoned defence—by no means an apology—of the institution. To him a slave is but a living tool or possession capable of nothing better than manual work. Such slaves are naturally so, and must be distinguished from others—such as captives in war, who are only legally slaves, or slaves by custom. There is some difficulty, especially in such a system of "fixed concepts" as the philosophy of Aristotle presents, in so regarding any human being, and Aristotle himself states the difficulty.[1] But although all men are alike in their possession of manhood, there is room for considerable diversity of nature within those limits, and Aristotle is content to take things as he finds them, and build his system accordingly; and, as the Aristotelian conception of justice is that of the harmonious working of the parts in the interest of the whole, with none of the Christian conception of the worth of the individual as such, there is no ultimate difficulty in the recognition of the facts[1]—men do differ in nature, some will be slaves in whatever station of life, while others will in no circumstances be such, even though in actual servitude.[2]

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[1] "In the first place, someone might raise a difficulty regarding slaves. Has a slave any virtue beyond the performance of menial service, some higher virtue, such as is prudence and courage and justice and the rest, or has he no virtue beyond that of bodily service? In either case, there is a difficulty. For if he has, then how do slaves differ from free men? But if he has not, then it is absurd, for he is a human being partaking of reason." (*Politics*, I. xiii. 2.)

Aristotle finds the solution in the nature of the slave's participation in reason—he can only *obey* reason and is not possessed of it himself (*ibid.* xiii. 7). Cf. I. v. 9: "He is naturally a slave who can belong to another (wherefore he does so belong) and can partake of reason to the extent of understanding but not possessing it."

Such is the philosophic defence of what was undoubtedly a pre-requisite of Athenian society. Let us examine the more practical side of the question and consider the conditions of the slave's daily life within that society. We are struck at first by the tremendous difference between the way in which the Greeks[3] and the Romans would seem to have treated their slaves. This is clearly reflected in their drama; everyone must have noticed the contrast between the miserable appearance of slaves, with their attendant *lorarii*, in the pages of Plautus and the dignified position which they occupy in the Greek tragedians—especially in Euripides.[4] But perhaps everyone has not noticed that this contrast is twofold. In Rome not only do the masters treat their slaves badly, but the whole aim and object of the slaves is to deceive their masters,[1] so much so that a typical Plautine comedy is little more than a concatenation of servile machinations, upon the miscarriage of which comes the inevitable *actum est de pelle mea*. With the Greeks of the classical age the relations between master and slave must have been something very different; it is true that we have to conjecture a good deal, but if the relations were such as obtained at Rome, we should hardly find Plato, for example, taking the *slave* of Menon—for no apparent reason—for the famous experiment to illustrate his doctrine of "recollection," and the *pædagogus* would not have been held in such honour in the average household that his inclusion in the sculptural group representing the slaying of the children of Niobe causes no surprise. Similarly in the *Ion* Creusa regards the old *pædagogus* of Erectheus as her own father:

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[1] "It is clear then that some men are by nature slaves and others free, and for the former it is expedient and right that they should be slaves." (*Politics*, I. v. 11.)

[2] "We must admit that some men are slaves everywhere, while others are so nowhere." (*Ibid.* vi. 6.)

[3] At least in the classical age. Things are different in the New Comedy.

[4] That Euripides' treatment of slaves was peculiarly humane is obvious not only from the more prominent part which we see them taking in the extant plays, as compared with the parts they play in Æschylus and Sophocles, but also from the fact that Aristophanes makes a special jibe against Euripides on this account:

"Then from the start, no word was left unsaid,
Woman or slave, they chattered none the less."
(*Frogs*, 948.)

> I, though thy mistress, give thee back the care
> Which thou of old didst show unto my sire; (733–4.)

and in one lost tragedy—the *Alexander*—the hero of the play was a slave. When we come to the Macedonian era and the break-up of the city-state we find—as in the mime of Herodas—conditions very much nearer to those which were common at Rome,[2] but there can be no doubt that such conditions were very different from those which obtained in the classical age.[1] In Euripides, at any rate, we find not only a remarkable consideration for the feelings of slaves, but also a remarkable loyalty of slaves towards their masters.

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[1] Hence the readiness with which they co-operate with younger sons to deceive their fathers.

[2] How far were these due to the advent of the *Græculus esuriens* and the tendency to ill-treat an intellectual superior whom fortune has delivered into one's power?

The death of Alcestis is a blow to the whole household, servants included, and is the occasion of a very touching display of fellow-feeling:

> And all the slaves within the house did weep,
> Lamenting their dear mistress. And she stretched
> Her hand to each; none was so base but that
> He heard fair words and answered back the like.
> (*Alcestis*, 192–5.)

Nor is this surprising, for throughout her life Alcestis had been like a mother to her slaves—

> She was to me and all the slaves
> Just like a mother— (*Ibid.* 769.)

is the explicit avowal of one of them. All of them, we gather, appreciated her:

> And they did wail,
> For such a mistress had they lost at home; (*Ibid.* 948.)

and we may believe that the avowal of community of feeling between slaves and mistress, such as:

> We lay to heart the sorrows of our lords, (*Ibid.* 813.)

is no mere form of speech but a heart-felt declaration. In the pages of Euripides we find slaves over and over again giving expression to kindly, human feelings, as for example in the nurse's patient tending of Phædra in the *Hippolytus*, or in the loving care of the servants for the children of Medea:

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[1] It would be wrong to conclude from the fact that the evidence of slaves in the law-courts was only accepted under torture that they were generally ill-treated, and it seems that this did not apply to evidence of facts, but was only resorted to when a slave denied knowledge, or was suspected of concealing it in the interests of his master. See some interesting observations on the subject in Mahaffy's *Social Life in Greece*, pp. 244 ff.

> When thy twin children with their sire did come,
> And reached the house that was thy bridal home,
> We slaves, who felt the weight of thy distress,
> Were filled with joy. Soon was the rumour spread
> That the ancient strife was settled with thy spouse.
> One kissed the hands, and one the golden hair,
> Of thy dear children. (*Medea*, 1136–42.)

It is a display of affection such as we associate more with some valued and privileged retainer of long standing in a modern family, than with the slaves of the ancient world. There are, of course, good slaves and bad, as is implied in the remark:

> The fortunes of their lords, when evil comes,
> Affect good slaves and weigh upon their minds.
> (*Ibid.* 54–5.)

Indeed good slaves are only slaves in name, not by nature. There is nothing discreditable in being such a one; the discredit would be in having the nature of a slave:

> One thing alone brings shame to slaves—the name,
> But in all else a slave, so he be good,
> Is nothing worse than any free-born man.
> (*Ion*, 854–6.)

As we have already learnt, it is the internal state, the real worth of a man, that matters, and not his external conditions:

> Base slave, who cares not what his lord's estate
> May be, nor shares his joys, nor grieves at his
> Distress. May I—though born to servitude—
> Be ever reckoned with the noble slaves.
> Even if the name of freeman be not mine,
> My mind is free. And of two evils this
> Is better far, than being a slave at once
> To others, and being oneself debased in mind.
> (*Helena*, 726–33.)

The word which we have translated by the epithet "noble" in this messenger's speech is an epithet which by the usage of the Greek language was confined to the free-born, and its attribution here to a slave is almost of the nature of a linguistic oxymoron, but it is a most significant indication of how far Euripides is in advance of his age in his conception of slavery. He is really in advance of Aristotle who, as we have seen, found the ultimate defence of the institution in the fact that many a slave is by nature a slave. Euripides goes farther than Aristotle and insists upon the fact, so disconcerting to our acquiescence in this comfortable assurance, that many a free man is by nature a slave, and many a slave by nature noble-souled. So slaves are allowed, as Aristophanes objected, to speak no less freely in the dramas of Euripides than free-born men and women. They will even philosophise, as his messengers frequently do. The one in the *Helena*, for example, gives his opinion about the futility of oracles, and the phenomenon is common enough for it to have earned a jibe from Aristophanes.[1]

Other indications of the humanity of Euripides, in addition to his treatment of children and of slaves, are to be found in his delineation of the weaker traits of human character—of irresolution and repentance, for example. We have just noted the irresolution of Medea before killing her children, and we had something to say in our first chapter about the struggle of Iphigenia with herself at Aulis before she could overcome her natural shrinking from the thought of death.[2]

[1] Oh thrice blessed Euripides in that
This slave has answered with such wisdom.
(*Acharn.* 400–1.)

[2] See above, p. 9.

We have also had occasion to glance at the irresolution of Agamemnon himself,[1] and we may add the very human treatment in the *Electra* of the hesitation of Orestes before committing matricide.[2] The character of Hermione[3] in the *Andromache* we have found to be a study in the psychology of repentance, and the whole plot of the *Helena*, that most fanciful of all the plays of Euripides, is based upon the palinode of Stesichorus[4] upon an attempt to do justice to the memory of an injured woman. Even Clytemnestra is not without the "milk of human kindness" in the pages of Euripides. As we have seen, she can pity the humble condition of Electra in the lowly cottage to which she has been banished to live with a farmer-husband, can understand the daughter's passionate love for her murdered father, and can even find it in her heart to question the justice of her own deed:

> O child, thy nature is to love thy sire
> Alway. 'Tis so. Some are children of their sires;
> Some love the mother more. I pardon thee.
> For, child, I take not over-joy in deeds
> I've done. But why art thou unwashed, unkempt,
> Now that thy travail pangs of birth are o'er?
> O wretched that I am for my designs!
> How more than right I drove my spouse to wrath!
>
> (*Elect.* 1102–10.)

Nothing can be more human than Electra's tender nursing of her frenzied brother in the *Orestes*. It is a trait of human kindness upon which Euripides has dwelt more than once, in the case of the nurse of Phædra in the *Hippolytus*, for example, but the love of a sister for a brother adds an additional touch of gentleness to the following picture:

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[1] p. 69. [2] ll. 967–87. [3] See above, p. 11.

[4] The old tale that is told is untrue,
Thou didst not go in the well-benched ships,
Nor camest thou to the towers of Troy.

*O*. Whence have I come? And how did I get here?
I don't remember it. My mind's a blank!
*E*. O dearest one, how glad I saw thee sleep.
Dost wish I take and lift thy body up?
*O*. Do! Do! And from my mouth and eyes
Wipe out—ah me!—the foamy, clotted blood.
*E*. Lo! Sweet the service is. I do not grudge
To tend a brother's limbs with sister's hands.
*O*. Prop up my side with thine. And from my face
Brush off the unkempt hair. I see but dim.
*E*. O wretched, squalid head of curls! How wild
Thou art become, from long, long lack of care.
*O*. Lay me down again! When the frenzy goes,
It leaves me nerveless, and with limbs all weak.
*E*. Lo! Bed is pleasant to the sick, and yet
It is a grievous thing, but necessary.
*O*. Once more support me! Turn my body round!
The sick are hard to please, through helplessness.
*E*. Would'st like to set thy feet upon the ground,
To feel them? Sweet is change in everything. (215–34.)

The memory of the care of Tyndareus for him in childhood makes Orestes unable to look that old man in the face, after the manner in which he has requited that care; and there is something peculiarly touching in the contrast between his present lot, with all the misery of his participation in the drama of life, which his growing to manhood has brought him, and the happy innocence of his babyhood which his memory thus calls up before his mind:

O Menelaus! I am undone, here comes
Tyndareus, whom most I'm shamed to meet,
For what I've done. In childhood he did rear
Me up, and showered kisses on me then,
Carrying Agamemnon's child about
With Leda at his side. They honoured me
No less than those Twin Sons of Zeus. And I—
O wretched heart and wretched soul of mine!—
Have made them foul return. What shade
To hide my head have I? What cloud is there
Behind which I may 'scape the old man's gaze?
(*Ibid*. 459–69.)

It is touches such as these that entitle Euripides to be regarded as the most human of the Greek tragedians.[1]

## Humanism

We have said that by the humanism of Euripides we mean something not qualitatively different from his humanity, but more philosophically envisaged as part of a system in which a pre-eminent significance is allotted to that humanity. It would be idle, of course, to expect to find a complete philosophical explanation of the universe in the pages of a dramatic poet; but Euripides was a philosopher, and it is possible—as will be made clear in the next chapter—to gauge his general philosophical attitude with a fair amount of accuracy and certainty. But here we are concerned to note, not the influence of definite philosophical doctrine upon his mind, but the effect, as reflected in his plays, of a certain change in the ordinary man's attitude to life which distinguishes Euripides from Æschylus as clearly as Thucydides from Herodotus. Definite philosophical speculation, no doubt, was a prime factor in causing this change; but, so far as it is possible to do so, let us try to examine the change in the general spirit of the age apart from its definitely philosophical manifestations.

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[1] Jebb (*Attic Orators*, p. xcix) calls this a fallacy and says that Euripides is human, but Sophocles is more human. He very aptly applies to Sophocles the words which Jowett (Introduction to the *Phædrus*, 2nd edition, ii. 102) uses of Plato: "We do not immediately recognise that under the marble exterior of Greek literature was concealed a soul thrilling with spiritual emotion." Comparisons are odious; but if Euripides is to be compared with Sophocles in this respect, I should say that with him human emotion breaks through the "marble exterior" which serves to contain it in the case of his great contemporary. Euripides was less of an artist than Sophocles, but he was hardly less human.

Herodotus typifies the Greek attitude to life before this change had begun to set in, and of him K. O. Müller well says, "The history of Herodotus has an epic character, not only from the equable and uninterrupted flow of the narrative, but also from certain pervading ideas, which give a uniform tone to the whole. The principal of these is the idea of a fixed destiny, of a wise arrangement of the world, which has prescribed to every being his path, and which allots ruin and destruction, not only to crime and violence, but to excessive power and riches, and the overweening pride which is their companion."[1] This envy of the gods, as Herodotus calls it, brings about the just punishment of mortals for all forms of "hybris"—that peculiar sin of all early civilisations—and man is well advised so to direct his life as to avoid arousing it. Jehovah is a jealous god, or as Æschylus says:

> Wise men all bow the knee to Nemesis. (*P. V.* 936.)

All this is, of course, familiar to the reader of Herodotus, but in order fully to realise its significance I venture to ask him to reflect for a moment upon all that is implied in the only comment which the historian allows himself upon the defeat of the Persians at the battle of Platæa. The battle marks the final defeat of barbarism by Hellenism, yet the most momentous remark that Herodotus has to make about it is one that might have been called forth by some religious scruple involved in some slight border-skirmish between insignificant tribes. At the turning-point of the battle he writes:

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[1] *History of the Literature of Ancient Greece* (Donaldson's ed.), i. 359.

> At Platæa when the Persians were routed by the Spartans they fled in disorder to their own camp and the wooden wall which they had built in the district of Thebes. It seems marvellous to me that, though the fighting took place near the grove of Demeter, not a single Persian seems to have died in the sacred precinct or even to have set foot within it, but around the precinct, in unconsecrated ground, great numbers fell. And I think—if one should venture an opinion on religious matters—that it was the goddess herself who kept them out, because they had set fire to her temple at Eleusis. (ix. 65.)

What a different atmosphere was that breathed by Thucydides! The passions of men have with him taken the place of this envy of the gods, everything is regarded from an anthropocentric point of view, and nothing from a theocentric one. There could be no better illustration of this than the account which he gives of the dreadful outbursts of faction all over Greece which accompanied the opening years of the Peloponnesian war. It was almost like the scourge of a plague, which broke out, now here, now there, but always with increasingly violent manifestations. Surely here, if anywhere, we might expect the historian to see the visitations of divine wrath. But he traces it simply to the passions of men:

> Many grievous things befell the states owing to faction, such as occur and always will occur so long as human nature remains the same, though in different degrees and forms according to the change of circumstances. (III. lxxxii. 2.)

Such things occur and will occur, not so long as men rouse the envy of the gods, but *so long as human nature remains the same*. Man is the protagonist of the drama played on this world's stage, and if the gods figure at all, it is not by direct participation, but only indirectly, by working through men. Religious scruples are occasionally mentioned by Thucydides, but they play a very different part from the one they have in the pages of Herodotus. They are no longer mentioned as of any significance in themselves, but appear unblushingly as no more than a cloak to hide human motives and interests, as witness the use made both by the Athenians and the Spartans of the superstition of a taint, or pollution, resting upon a country owing to its religious misdeeds in the past, when just before the declaration of war each side bade the other drive out its pollutions, and this is the comment of Thucydides upon the motives of the Spartans:

> Now the Spartans bade them drive out this pollution, using the rendering of a service to the gods as a pretext, but really because they knew that Pericles, the son of Xanthippus, was related to him [the pollution to be driven out] on the mother's side, and because they considered that if he were exiled their negotiations with Athens would proceed more easily. They did not really expect that he would suffer this, but hoped to discredit him with his fellow-citizens and make them think that his misfortune was in part the cause of the war. For he was the most influential man of his time and leader of the state and he was opposed to the Spartans in everything, and did not allow the Athenians to give in to them, but urged them to war. (i. 127.)

Now Euripides differs from Æschylus in this respect very much in the same way as Thucydides differs from Herodotus. Æschylus, like Herodotus, was conscious of the envy of the gods, and found those wise who bowed before the inexorable decrees of Fate. Euripides knows no such inexorable Fate. It is true that he tells us in one place, "Nothing is more powerful than Fate," but this Fate does not seem to be external to humanity. It is equated, as it might have been by Æschylus, with Zeus; but it is also equated in the same passage, as it never would have been by Æschylus, with the "Mind of Man,"[1] which a fragment tells us is "god":

> For the mind that is in each of us is god. (1018.)

The reader may remember that in the Acts of the Apostles (xvii. 28), St. Paul in commenting upon the immanence of God in man says, quoting Aratus or Cleanthes, "as certain even of your own poets have said—'For we are even THY offspring.'" He might equally well have quoted Euripides, who holds that man, in virtue of his highest qualities, partakes of the divine nature:

> Our life depends on thine,
> And what we do is ordered by thy will. (*Suppl.* 735.)

Human nature, then, is closely related to the nature of God. In the next chapter we must consider this doctrine of "nature" more carefully, but here it suffices to note that it is a doctrine that places Euripides nearer to a modern writer such as Maeterlinck than to his great predecessor Æschylus. Maeterlinck, as everyone knows, found La Destinée controlled by *la sagesse*. What we call destiny is ourselves, our own nature. "Gravissez la montagne ou descendez dans le village, allez au bout du monde ou bien promenez-vous autour de la maison, vous ne rencontrerez que vous-même sur les routes du hasard. Si Judas sort ce soir, il ira vers Judas et aura l'occasion de trahir mais si Socrate ouvre sa porte, il trouvera Socrate endormi sur le seuil et aura l'occasion d'être sage."[1]

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[1] *Troades*, 886.

Such an anthropocentric attitude involves the rejection of a belief in forces entirely external to humanity, operating apart from man's activity. The maxim of Protagoras contains at least a half-truth: whatever we say, we can no longer believe God is the measure of all things. And Euripides is moved to say what he believes. Whatever his own religious beliefs were—and we shall try to ascertain these in our last chapter—they did not involve any concern for the anthropomorphic gods of the Olympian religion. They are frequently left to shift for themselves, as Apollo is, somewhat impatiently, throughout the *Ion*. Scant respect is shown by Hippolytus, in the play of that name, for the traditional Aphrodite; in fact he openly bids her "go hang":

But to thy Cypris wave I long farewell; (113.)

and the sentiment is so frequent that it led Dr. Verrall to read into Euripides a covert attack upon the whole system of theology to which such deities belong. But the true explanation of the treatment of these deities at the hands of Euripides is that his interest has shifted away from them to humanity itself. His attitude might be represented by the following poem of William Cory's *Mimnermus in Church*:

You promise heavens free from strife,
  Pure truth, and perfect change of will;
But sweet, sweet is this human life,
  So sweet I fain would breathe it still;
Your chilly stars I can forego,
This warm kind world is all I know.

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[1] *La Sagesse et La Destinée*, p. 28.

You say there is no substance here,
  One great reality above:
Back from that void I shrink in fear,
  And child-like hide myself in love:
Show me what angels feel. Till then,
I cling, a mere weak man, to men.

You bid me lift my mean desires
  From faltering lips and fitful veins
To sexless souls, ideal quires,
  Unwearied voices, wordless strains:
My mind with fonder welcome owns
One dear dead friend's remembered tones.

Forsooth the present we must give
  To that which cannot pass away;
All beauteous things for which we live
  By laws of time and space decay.
But oh, the very reason why
I clasp them, is because they die.

Good and evil alike are confined within the sphere of humanity. Misfortune is not due to the gods, but to our own fault:

Heaven is not unjust, but evil men
Cause sickness and confusion. (*Frag*. 606.)

Menelaus asks Orestes not what god, but what disease has destroyed him, and the answer is instructive:

*M*. What's wrong with thee? What illness bears thee down?
*O*. My conscience; for I know what deeds I've done.
(*Orestes*, 395–6.)

It is, no doubt, often very convenient to mortals to be able to use the gods of conventional religion as scapegoats, as it were, for their own passions, as Pentheus in the *Bacchæ* accuses the women of Thebes of doing:

It chanced that I was not within this land,
When tidings came of new ills in the state:
That our women-folk have left their homes, and feign
A Bacchic rout, and rush through bosky dells
Honouring Dionysus, the new god,

> Whoe'er he be, with dance. And it was said
> That in their midst stood brimming bowls of wine,
> While here and there in solitude they served
> The lusts of men, being—as they said—inspired
> And priestesses, but really following lust
> Far more than they do Dionysus serve. (215–25.)

But, as we have seen, Dionysus is not the predisposing cause of anything:

> It is not Dionysus shall compel
> Women to self-control in Love. Their souls
> Must first approve it. Even in Bacchic rites
> The chaste at heart shall never come to harm.
> (*Ibid.* 314–18.)

Man is the cause of his own evil, as he is of his own good. External deities are meaningless; but tradition has handed them down to us, and the best that we can do is to give them what reality we can in relation to ourselves by humanising them, as it were. This Euripides does. Unlike Lucretius, for example, he holds that the gods do care for mortals. In the *Electra* we find the Dioscuri telling us that they pity man's misfortunes:

> For we and all the dwellers in Heaven
> Feel pity for the toils of mén. (1329–30.)

Similarly in the *Bacchæ* we read:

> In the ether they do dwell,
> These gods of heavenly birth.
> But thence they can view well
> Whate'er is done on earth. (392–4.)

One could mention several instances of kindness shown by the gods towards mortals. The conception of Apollo, for example, which we find in the *Alcestis* is that of a very kindly deity. Thanatos accuses him of carrying his services to the house of Admetus to the point of injustice to him. When he asks why Apollo carries a bow and is told that it is Apollo's custom so to do, he retorts:

> Yea, and to help this house beyond all right. (41.)

In the *Troades* Poseidon tells us that kindly feeling for the Trojans is never absent from his mind:

> Since that far time when round this Trojan land
> Phœbus and I did raise the walls of stone
> With plummet-line, no, never from my mind
> Has fled my care for city of my folk. (4–7.)

Finally, Dionysus in the *Bacchæ* is described as being most mild to mortals (861.) This is a change from the Æschylean conception of the gods, as superhuman and awe-inspiring powers, which we may compare with the similar change—in the representation of gods—in the history of Greek sculpture. Euripides is in advance of his age, but what we see in him is identical with what we see in the later manifestations of sculpture in the fourth century. The dignity of the Olympian Zeus of Pheidias, which was regarded as having added something to the received religion,[1] has given place to a kindlier and more human conception of godhead, as we see it, for example, in the Hermes of Praxiteles and—even more—in the benign head of the Asclepius of Melos. Just as these sculptured deities of the fourth century are different from those of the fifth, so are the gods of Euripides different from those of Æschylus. There is a truth, not intended by Aristophanes, in the remark which Euripides is made to make in the *Frogs*:

> The gods to whom I pray are other gods. (889.)

This "new coinage"—as Dionysus there calls it—or, as we prefer to call it, the religion of humanity,[2] leads

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[1] Quint. XX. x. 9: "Cuius pulchritudo adiecisse aliquid etiam receptae religioni videtur; adeo maiestas operis deum aequavit."

[2] Notice that of the four "gods," to which Euripides proceeds to pray, three are burlesqued forms of *human* qualities:

> "O Air that nurtures me, O twisting tongue,
> O smelling nostrils and mind's perception,
> Grant me success in all I undertake." (*Frogs*, 892–4.)

For the significance of the fourth—ether—see below, p. 196.

Euripides, in his treatment of the legends, to purge away the baser elements of mythology, and to lift them on to a higher plane. In fact, he rationalises the legends in a spirit of humanism. This may well be illustrated by his treatment of the story of Orestes. According to tradition Orestes had avenged his father Agamemnon, who had been murdered by his wife Clytemnestra, by the terrible expedient of taking his own mother's life, and was as a result driven mad by the pursuit of avenging Furies. The legend implied a belief in the existence of certain avenging powers, euphemistically styled Eumenides. In Æschylus these Furies appear visibly upon the stage as living beings of flesh and blood, and their doings fill an entire play. In Euripides they are seen—or imagined—only by the frenzied Orestes, who exclaims:

> O mother, beseech thee, hound not on
> The maidens gory-eyed and serpent-locked!
> For here they throng around, and nearer come.
> (*Orestes*, 255–7.)

His sister, Electra, tells him that he sees nothing of what he imagines:

> Stay quietly in thy bed, O wretched man!
> Thou seest naught of what thou seem'st to see.
> (*Ibid.* 258–9.)

If we ask whether Euripides believed in their existence or not, the answer depends upon what we mean by "existence." Few people to-day "believe in the devil" as an actual person. Similarly, Euripides did not believe in the Erinyes as malignant powers external to humanity. But this is not to say that he did not believe in their reality. Subjective feelings are often very real, and the Erinyes of Euripides are real enough, although they are not the dread, objective beings which Æschylus, with all his love for the marvellous and the awful, presents us with. They are qualities of humanity, the awful prickings of conscience described so well by Cicero. "Do you see," he writes in the speech *Pro Sexto Roscio Amerino* (xxiv. 66), "in the case of those whom the poets have represented for us as inflicting punishment upon their mother in order to avenge their father, though they are said to have done so at the bidding of the immortal gods and their oracles, how the Furies pursue them and do not allow them to rest anywhere, because they could not even be pious without committing a crime? Such is the case, gentlemen of the jury. The blood of a mother or of a father has great power; it is a mighty bond, of awful sanction. If any stain be conceived from it, not only can it not be washed out, but it percolates through to the mind to such an extent that raving madness and insanity results. For do not imagine, as you often see depicted in plays, that those who have committed any impious crime are driven about and terrified by the burning torches of the Furies. A man's own deceit, his own terror, oppresses him most; his own crime harries him and whelms him in madness; his own evil thoughts and the prickings of his conscience terrify him. These are the constant, secret, Furies which, in the case of the impious, exact punishment on behalf of their parents from wicked sons both by day and night."

No better instance of the humanism of Euripides could be given than is afforded by his treatment of these Furies thus rationalised by Cicero.

## CHAPTER VII

### EURIPIDES THE PHILOSOPHER

We have suggested that modern adverse criticism of Euripides has been occasioned, much more than is generally recognised, by the buffoonery of Aristophanes. But this external cause is only made operative by an internal one, by something in the poet himself which makes him objectionable to the many, by the fact that he was a philosopher and a critic as well as a poet. He was a man who could not away with any dilettante view of literature, which he regarded as one of the deepest forces in the world, as something which ought to be of real service to a man in the conduct of his life, and so he speaks very bitterly of those who made of it no more than a pleasant refinement:

> Fools might you call those earlier men,
>   Who invented hymns for the festal throng,
> Who for dinners and gatherings of clans would pen
>   A pleasant refinement of life—a song.
> But no one with song or the many-stringed lyre
>   Invented a cure for the ills of mankind;
> Though their ills, we all know, are most grievous and dire,
>   Bringing death to all homes and destruction behind.
> Yet were it a boon to bring mortals some healing
>   Of grievous afflictions, with dance and with song.
> But when men are all feasting, and dancers are reeling,
>   It is idle to raise your voices for long.
>
> (*Medea*, 190–201.)

To Euripides poetry was no mere accompaniment of the feast, no trivial adornment of life, but a thing of high seriousness, conceived of in the spirit which makes

Milton in his *Essay on Education* speak of "a complete and generous education" as "that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously, all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war." It is—to take a modern example—the spirit in which Masefield invokes the muse:

O wanderer into many brains,
O spark the emperor's purple hides,
You sow the dusk with fiery grains,
When the gold horseman rides.
O Beauty in the darkness hurled,
Be it through me you shame the world.

In exactly the same way does Euripides invoke Zeus:

Send up the souls of the dead, that we may learn
Whence troubles are sprung, what soil;
To what god we should sacrifice when we yearn
To find a respite from our toil. (*Frag.* 912.)

In one fragment his personal ideal of life is thus expressed:

Blessed is he who once has learnt the tales of old,
Who is not therefore stirred to harm his fellow-men,
Nor inclined to evil deeds, but ever doth behold
The unageing order of the immortal world within his ken,—
Whence? How? and Why? it is composed—for such a one
No thought of shameful deeds doth e'er approach his mind.
(*Frag.* 910.)

It is an ideal of life which may briefly be described as the disinterested pursuit of knowledge with its right connotation in the moral sphere. It was this spirit, and not that he was a misanthrope, that made him live the life of a recluse, preferring to contemplate in solitude the ideal possibilities of human nature rather than to participate in such an unsuitable arena for their realisation as contemporary Athens must have been after the restraining hand of Pericles had been removed. By so doing he could the more readily idealise the city that he loved, for to him Athens was always the home of intellectual enlightenment:

Blessed the line that is sprung
From Erectheus of old!
O sons of the gods, who are sung
In fables of gold!
A holy land unsacked
And wisdom fair
Are yours, who never lacked
For bright, clear air,
Daintily to make your way
Where Harmony sprang
From the nine sacred muses, they say,
Who goldenly sang. (*Medea*, 824–32.)

It is true that the treatment which he received at the hands of the city he thus glorifies, was far from encouraging. There is probably a good deal of personal feeling in the words which he puts into the mouth of Medea:

Alas! Alas!
Not now the first time, but oft before, Creon,
My reputation has done me hurt, and wrought
Great harm. A wise man never should take care
To have his children made exceeding wise.
For, quite apart from the toil involved, it brings
Them hostile envy from the citizens.
Bringing new wisdom you will be held by fools
A useless man, of wisdom quite bereft. (*Ibid.* 292–301.)

But, in spite of this, we cannot doubt his sincere devotion both to Athens and to philosophy.

As a scholar he was naturally influenced by the great teachers of his day. Most of the great Sophists had visited Athens during the lifetime of Euripides, and he must have had personal relations with many of them. He is in particular connected with Anaxagoras, whose pupil he is said to have been, and his dramas were certainly regarded as expounding the doctrines of Anaxagoras, for Plato makes Socrates in the *Apology* say that anyone can, by paying a drachma, go to the theatre and hear that such doctrines (as that the sun is a stone) are derived from Anaxagoras and are not, as Meletus would have the jury believe, due to the teaching of Socrates.[1] There is no mention of Euripides by name, but he is obviously referred to. The reference in the *Orestes* (982 ff.) to the stone slung midway between heaven and earth is generally regarded as a case in point.[2] But we are not here concerned to find traces of any of Anaxagoras' cosmological theories, fascinating as they may have been, in a writer whose philosophical value is ethical and not cosmological at all. Whatever may be thought about the propriety of expounding philosophical opinions in poetical form, it must be admitted that, in spite of Lucretius, Parmenides and others, a poem is not the most suitable of vehicles; but at the same time ethical speculations upon the nature of the Supreme Being and upon life after death, are not so incongruous with poetical form as are more technical meteorological speculations. Indeed every great poet is bound to treat of them implicitly, if not explicitly. Euripides is a philosopher as well as a poet, simply because he at times breaks out into an explicit, and not merely implicit, discussion of these themes. Now we really know little about Anaxagoras, but his position in the development of Greek philosophical speculations is quite clear. Like Empedocles, he serves after the breakdown of Ionian monism, when it is seen once for all that philosophy cannot be at once monistic and materialistic—owing to the impossibility of explaining motion on such an hypothesis—to form the transition to a non-materialistic interpretation of things. His great contribution was his doctrine of mind—"All things were in chaos—then mind came and arranged them"—which, whatever may be thought of it—and both Plato[1] and Aristotle[2] expressed dissatisfaction at the small use which seems to have been made of the principle by Anaxagoras himself—contains at any rate the germs of a doctrine that will be capable of explaining motion, such as Aristotle's own efficient cause or Plato's doctrine of soul as source of motion. A recent writer[3] has maintained, on the verbal ground that Euripides doesn't use the word "mind" as an ordering principle in the universe, that no trace of this doctrine can be found in the poet. But this is a sadly mistaken method of criticism, for there are very definite indications in the plays that Euripides believed in a monistic spiritual force,[4] and although this is not necessarily to be identified with the "mind" of Anaxagoras, it is a very definite product of that development of philosophical speculation to which Anaxagoras thus contributed. *Literally* Euripides may have owed little to him, but *spiritually* he owed much.

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[1] *Apology*, 26d.

[2] Decharme, op. cit., p. 27 (Loeb's. trans.), will not have it so. See pp. 21–31—on the general relation of Euripides to Anaxagoras.

Protagoras is the chief other philosopher who is said peculiarly to have influenced Euripides. A reference to the famous "Man is the measure of all things" has been detected in the line:

> What shame is there, but thinking makes it so?
> (*Frag.* 19.)

which is parodied by Aristophanes in the *Frogs* (1475), and we are told that Plato meeting Euripides upbraided him with the line, saying:

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[1] *Phædo*, 98b.

[2] *Metaphysics*, 985a, 20.

[3] Decharme, op. cit., p. 29 (Loeb's trans.).

[4] See pp. 194 ff.

> Shame is shame, whate'er thou think'st or not.
> (STOBÆUS, *Flor.* v. 82.)

As the line is an isolated fragment it would be rash to draw any conclusions from it; be it sufficient to note that, like the famous *Hippolytus*, 612, it is capable of a more idealistic interpretation than that given it by Plato in this reproach, and may, in its context, have been no more than an instance of Euripides' insistence upon the internal sanction in ethics. For, literally interpreted, it is quite at variance with the whole of the poet's ethical teaching. There is in him none of the subjectivism of Protagoras.[1] He is no mere reflector of the views of the sophists, but, like Socrates, rather a critic of them. He must often have heard Protagoras lecture, and was probably on very intimate terms with him[2]; but what is a verbal reminiscence here and there in the plays in face of the two indisputable facts:

(1) That Euripides had a profound distrust of the sophistic rhetoric generally.

(2) That he is in his ethical doctrine more removed—if possible—from Protagoras, than from any of the other sophists?

Let us examine these two points a little more in detail. In a sense, Euripides is himself very oratorical and it was on this account that Quintilian found him so much more useful than Sophocles in the training of a young orator.[1] Probably he was influenced more than he realised by the conditions of his day. At any rate his characters often indulge in set speeches *pro* and *con*, with an occasional apology for so doing,[2] which sometimes leads [3] to rather irrelevant moralizing, and they are especially fond of giving a rationalistic interpretation to what has previously been taken on a religious sanction.[4] All this is certainly the result of sophistic influence; but at the same time Euripides reacts upon that influence, and he was especially opposed to that glorification of rhetoric to which the sophists, as a class, were so prone. Such a glorification would naturally repel any sincere ethical teacher—as it did Socrates—for even if rhetoric be not devoted to securing the victory of the "lesser argument" over the "greater," it is essentially non-moral, a mere power of persuasion. This distrust is very prominent in the *Bacchæ*:

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[1] It is convenient to follow the usual interpretation of his philosophy, but, of course, "man" in his famous maxim *may* have meant "mankind."

[2] Protagoras is said, by some, to have read his famous treatise about the gods at the house of Euripides (Diog. Laert. IX. viii. 5).

> When a man of wisdom finds fair chance of talk
> 'Tis no great thing to make a speech sound well.
> But thou, fair-running tongue, as though some brains
> Hast got, but in thy words there is no sense. (266–9.)

So says Teiresias to Pentheus; but the distrust is by no means confined to the *Bacchæ*. This is a point of importance, for the *Bacchæ* is in many respects so different from most of the other plays that some scholars have been inclined to regard it as a sort of recantation on the part of Euripides—it was his last play—of views expressed in earlier works. This is a view with which the present work is in complete disagreement; we shall have to discuss it in detail in our next chapter. Here it is sufficient to notice that the distrust of rhetoric, common to the *Bacchæ* and to other plays, cannot be made one of the tokens of the supposed change of attitude in that play. Such distrust is almost a commonplace in Euripides. The nurse in the *Hippolytus*, for example, says:

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[1] *Instit. Orat.* X. i. 67.

[2] *Orestes*, 640–1.

[3] e.g. in the speech of Theseus, *Suppl.* 195 ff.

[4] *Bacchæ*, 292–7; *Troades*, 989–90; *Hipp.* 386–7.

> Fine words—too fine!—are what destroys the homes
> Of men, and ruins their well-established states.
> We should not try to please the ears in speech,
> But say what brings one glory and renown; (486–9.)

and Hecuba, in the play of that name, gives very clear expression to what we may take to have been Euripides' own feelings on the subject:

> Agamemnon, never should the tongue with men
> Have had more power than deeds. But if a man
> Had done fair deeds, fair words should have been his;
> If vile, his words should have been putrid too;
> Nor should there ever have been power to speak
> Ill well. Right cunning is the craft of such,
> Yet can they not show cunning to the end,
> But perish basely. No one has escaped. (1187–94.)

The disparaging description of Odysseus in this play (131–2) is on the same grounds, and the Athenian demagogue was hated for the same reason. Such references as these are sufficient to convince us that although Euripides was, to some extent, involved unconsciously in the spirit of his age—with its glorification of rhetoric—and maybe consciously made concessions to it, yet he was never a supporter of it, and often appears as its outspoken critic. Anyone who reads a few pages of Seneca's *Medea* and contrasts it with Euripides' play, will at once perceive what rhetoric, if unchecked, will do to spoil a tragedy, which it has not done for Euripides.

But Euripides is not more opposed to the rhetoric of the sophists generally than he is to the subjectivism in ethics which results from the Protagorean maxim of "Man is the measure of all things." As we have already seen (p. 82), he insists upon the eternal sanctions of all moral values, which, with him, quite transcend all individual limitations. There could not be a more definite contrast between the eternal nature of moral distinctions[1] and the shifting nature of individual qualities than is implied in the question:

And is truth dead, since thou art in distress? (*Phœn.* 922.)

and the contrast is explicitly stated more than once:

So diverse are the hearts of men,
Diverse their ways. But clear to view
True goodness shineth through. (*Iph. Aul.* 558–60.)

But it is in the fine speech of Hecuba, in the play of that name, that the clearest expression is given to these ideas. As contrasted with material things the moral virtues are not affected by the changes of external fortune, but are immutably what they are:

Is it not strange that from poor land
Good corn will grow, if heaven grant the weather,
While good ground, failing of its due, will bear
Poor fruit, but, in the case of men, the bad
Is evil always—nothing but the bad—
And the good is good, nor under fortune's blows
Changes his nature, but noble is through all? (592–8.)

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[1] These have already been dealt with in the chapter on "Internal and External Standards of Morality"; a few more examples are added here to show how typical of Euripides they are. I have treated of his ethics apart from this chapter on Philosophy because I feel that his moral standard was the result of his insight as a poet rather than of his speculations as a philosopher. But that poetical intuition is capable of logical defence only within the sphere of philosophy: he found the ultimate standard of morality in the "nature of man," which at first sight might seem to give a no less subjective standard than that afforded by "Man is the measure of all things," but that this was not so is seen as soon as we realise how the "nature of man" fits in with the whole philosophical scheme of nature generally. See below, pp. 155–6.

The doctrine is thoroughly Aristotelian in not allowing any informing influence of chance upon the nature of the good man—"Activities in accordance with virtue," says Aristotle, "control our happiness." Thus the philosopher pure and simple; and in the same strain Euripides, the dramatic poet and philosopher combined, makes Hecuba insist upon the omnipotence of right:

> I am a slave maybe, and weak at that.
> But the gods are strong, and Law their ruler too
> Is strong. Whereby we know the gods exist,
> And live our lives dividing right from wrong.
> If thou[1] uphold it not in all its strength,
> If those who murder guests and dare to steal
> The holy things of heaven, get not their due,
> Then is no justice in the world of men.
>
> (*Ibid.* 798–805.)

In all this we see that, though possibly influenced by them to some extent—as indeed any thinking man must have been—Euripides cannot rightly be described as a disciple of either Anaxagoras or of Protagoras. It would be much truer to speak of him as a disciple of Socrates, for the insistence, which we have noticed, upon the eternal and immutable nature of moral qualities is thoroughly Socratic. Indeed Socrates is said to have helped him in the writing of his plays, which were called by the epithet "Socrates-welded." And Aulus Gellius, after mentioning that Euripides went to the lectures of Anaxagoras for physics and of Prodicus for oratory, adds, "but to Socrates for moral philosophy." The tradition is of little importance in itself, but it is confirmed by the fact that the poet's own philosophical attitude is much nearer to that of Socrates than to that of the "destructive" Sophists.[2] Socrates taught that Virtue was Knowledge, and by this he meant that if the real nature of good and bad be once realised, that if we really grasp what it means to ourselves to become morally evil, then the nature of man is such that he will not willingly choose to become so—no one is willingly evil. Now Euripides' conception of the nature of man is thoroughly in harmony with this. Here lies the real point, and it is

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[1] She is addressing Agamemnon.

The passage is worth dwelling upon for other reasons than that with which we are immediately concerned. It helps, for example, to explain how Euripides can sometimes speak of Zeus, or of the God in the singular, as though he believed in some form of monotheism, and at other times of Gods, in the plural, as though he were a polytheist. When he speaks of God, or of Zeus, he is thinking of the great spiritual force in the universe, which permeates everything and is alike the source of our being and of our moral ideas. When he speaks of Gods he is, except perhaps when criticising the more anthropomorphic of the legends, thinking of the gods rather as abstractions of moral virtues than as beings in any sense. It is in this respect that Law is their ruler. Another point worth commenting upon is that we have here an excellent example of what we have described as the unfairness of taking isolated remarks out of their context. The Greek words which we have translated *Whereby* (i.e. by Law) *we know the gods exist* might equally well mean *we believe the gods exist by convention*, i.e. by itself the line might seem to indicate that Euripides taught that the belief in the existence of the gods was due solely to convention, whereas, in its context, it obviously means, as the scholiast rightly says, that from the existence of Law we infer the existence of gods.

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[1] Diog. Laert. II. v. 1, and the *Life* (Dindorf, p. 2): "Both Socrates the philosopher and Mnesilochus seem to have collaborated with him in some parts, as Telecleides says:

> 'Mnesilochus is there, for Euripides
> He cooks a novel play, while Socrates
> Supplies the wood.'"

[2] Decharme (op. cit., pp. 31–4) refuses to admit this, arguing that we can hardly be correct in thinking of Euripides as in any way a pupil of Socrates, when his plays contain no trace of such peculiarly Socratic doctrines as the equation of knowledge with virtue. Similarly Haigh (*Tragic Drama of the Greeks*, p. 278) says: "No trace is to be found in his writings of the Socratic doctrine that it is wrong to do evil to any man. On the contrary, he regards Vengeance as 'the fairest prize that the gods can bestow upon mankind'"—an unwarranted conclusion from *Bacchæ* (877–80), on which see above, in the Introduction to this book, p. xviii.

a mistake to take too narrow a line of interpretation either in this matter or in respect of the *Mind* of Anaxagoras. In the pages of Plato we often find Socrates engaged with the problem *Is virtue teachable?* and on this point, at any rate, Euripides would seem to be following sound Socratic doctrine. He tells us in the *Hecuba* that:

> Good nurture too does teach us what is right;
> And if a man learn this full well, he knows,
> By test of what is noble, what is base. (600–3.)

Again, in the *Suppliants*, he definitely speaks of virtue as teachable:

> For modesty is brought by nurture good.
> And every one who practises the right
> Is shamed at evil name. So virtue too
> Is teachable, if ever child does learn
> To speak and hear those things not known before.
> And what one learns abides until old age
> Is reached. So you should train your children well.
> (911–17.)

In yet another passage the influence of education upon virtue is very clearly affirmed:

> And nurture brings its training too
> Which helps us on to virtue's goal.
> For modesty wears wisdom's hue,
> And knowledge once set in thy soul
> Of what is right, has grace untold
> And brings thy life unfading fame.
> (*Iph. Aul.* 561–7.)

This is certainly not inconsistent with Socratic doctrine on the point. We may also mention another parallel—that between the purpose of punishment as expounded in the *Gorgias* of Plato and the assertion in the *Hecuba* that it is to the common interest of all that ill should betide the wicked and prosperity the good:

> This is the good of all—
> Of single men and of communities,
> That wicked suffer, and the good fare well. (902–4.)

But Euripides is an original thinker, and consequently, just as we find in him no mere reflection of the views of this or that Sophist but rather an individual development of them, so it is not to be expected that his doctrines should be traceable entirely to the influence of philosophers who preceded him in time. To a remarkable degree he forestalls many of the pet doctrines of Aristotle, whose philosophy was based so largely upon "current sayings"—the received opinion among the educated classes, to which Euripides must have contributed as much as anyone else. Aristotle, for example, begins his inquiry into the nature of happiness by drawing up a scale of "goods" which can easily be elicited from the pages of Euripides. The highest good, we are told, cannot be wealth, for the *auri sacra fames* moves to evil, makes Polymestor, for instance, treacherously slay Polydorus, the son of Priam, who had been entrusted to his care to save him from the dangers of war. Polymestor violates the most sacred trust in order to gain the treasure which Polydorus had with him, so soon as he hears that the Trojans have been beaten and so are no longer to be feared, will no longer be able to demand an account of his guardianship from him.

Moreover, we have only the usufruct, as lawyers would say, of wealth:

> We mortals have not wealth in our own right,
> But stewards are of what belongs to heaven;
> Which when God wills He takes away from us.
>
> (*Phœn.* 555–7.)

But, as Aristotle said, the good of man must be something permanent, whereas

> Great wealth abides not with mankind for long.
>
> (*Orestes*, 340.)

So wealth is ruled out, as also is honour, just as it was to be by Aristotle on the double ground that it is a virtue rather of the honourer than of the honoured and that it is not a sufficiently ultimate criterion, for we desire to be honoured by the discerning, and for our good qualities and not our bad ones. Euripides' grounds for rejecting it are, naturally, less analytical. In the *Phœnissæ* Jocasta warns her son Eteocles of the dangers that attend the worship of the goddess Ambition:

> Ambition is the vilest goddess known.
> Why court her, child? Desist. She is unjust.
> Many the happy homes and happy states
> She's entered, and left ruined who welcomed her.
> (531–4.)

Hecuba in her adversity realises that both wealth and honour are as nothing compared with the deeper things of life:

> O comely home! O halls of happiness,
> O Priam blest in many things, in wealth
> Of children too, and me their aged mother!
> How have we come to nothing, our former pride
> All gone! And yet we boast of things like these,
> This one of wealth in stately halls, another
> Because of honoured title from the folk.
> Such things are naught; idle the heart's desire
> And pride of tongue. He is the happiest man
> Whose life, throughout his days, knows naught of ill.
> (*Hec.* 619–28.)

It is the loss of these external goods that makes us realise their comparative worthlessness, and this is one of the lessons that adversity can teach us. Another is that adversity serves to put character to the test. Permanent and great adversity is an evil, for, as Aristotle says, "it hinders many activities," but under the ordinary misfortunes of life a good man will show his worth—"his fineness shines through." One feels this more in Euripides than in either of the other great tragedians. He is often said to be a very mournful and melancholy writer, but he always makes us feel that the lot of his tragic sufferers is, somehow, fine. It is this power alone that enables him to make so fine a tragedy out of the, dramatically speaking, very unpromising material of the *Troades*. Suffering is treated by him as having a certain "ideal" value; endless quotations could be given to this effect, for it is the whole spirit of plays such as the *Troades*, *Hecuba* and *Andromache*, but we will content ourselves with noting how the doctrine receives explicit statement when in the *Supplices* Adrastus appeals to Theseus and, after stating that Sparta is not to be relied upon, gives as his reason for turning to Athens for help the fact that she has seen trouble, and has a generous-souled youth for ruler:

> But thy state
> Alone could undertake this task, for she
> Has looked on sorrow, and has, in thee, a youth
> Of noble soul to lead her.
> (188–91.)

Closely connected with this treatment of suffering is the conviction that adversity provides unique opportunities for the exercise of virtue, that virtue is concerned with what is difficult. It is a point emphasised more in Christian, than in Greek, ethics; but just because it is not so prominent among the Greeks as with us, there is danger of our overlooking it even when it does occur. Yet it had passed into proverbial lore—"fine things are difficult"—and it is one of Hesiod's most striking maxims:

> Before the path of virtue the Gods placed sweat,
> (*Works and Days*, 289.)

and is fully recognised by Aristotle—"Both art and virtue are concerned with what is more difficult."[1] So with Euripides the noble is often painful, as Hecuba warned Polyxena in words we have quoted before:

> Well spoken, daughter; but in that "well" lies grief.
> (*Hec.* 382.)

Nobility deprives disaster of its acutest sting, and with this thought the mother—as we saw in our first chapter—consoles herself in her grief at her daughter's fate:

> And now I cannot from my mind erase
> Thy sorrow, so as not to wail. And yet
> The acutest sting hast thou removed, announced
> So nobly to me. (*Ibid.* 589–92.)

True worth, then, has little to do with material success. Just as a fine character shines out through adversity, so a base one is incapable of bearing prosperity, without, that is to say, showing up its own nature for what it is. The good man "four-square without a flaw" will bear whatever fortune has to give well and in seemly wise, but the bad man is incapable of so doing. In the *Supplices* Adrastus complains to Theseus that the Argives had not allowed him to recover the dead, and to Theseus' question:

> What do they say, seeing your request is right?

replies:

> Ay what? They know not how to bear success. (124.)

Prosperity leads with such natures to an insolent pride, as the Chorus explicitly state:

> Alas! how insolent the base do wax
> When heaven grants success—as though for aye.
> (*Ibid.* 463–4.)

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[1] *Ethics*, 1105a, 9.

External prosperity, material welfare, may safely be neglected in the search for happiness. The prosperity of the wicked is a problem in religious speculation only if the external good things of life are valued above the internal "goods" of the soul. True, it is commonly held that punishment comes sooner or later to the prosperous wicked, and this conviction also is found in Euripides:

Let no villain think,
Because he runs the first lap well, that he
Can conquer Justice in the race, before
He reach the end and turn the goal of life.
(*Elect.* 953–6.)

The Chorus will often give expression to such time-honoured platitudes as:

Injustice never brought success,
Justice alone to safety leads; (*Helena*, 1030–1.)

but the common experience of life is against it, so long as the usual connotation be given to the verb *to prosper.* The real answer is to give a more ideal interpretation to what we mean by prosperity. Then it is mere tautology to say "No evil man is fortunate," for to be evil is the greatest misfortune. Thus Œdipus, after reviewing the misfortunes of his life, upon Creon's decree of banishment, yet turns at the end to him and says:

I will not twine my arms about thy knees,
And prove a coward. However ill I fare,
This much I will preserve—nobility. (*Phœn.* 1622–4.)

There is a fragment of the *Scyriæ* lamenting the lot of the pious, which almost seems to bring this as a reproach against the gods:

Alas, unequal is the lot of men.
For some fare well, but others with mischance
Live always, spite of reverence for the gods.
Thus with exact and thoughtful care they spend
Their days with justice, free from shame. (*Frag.* 684.)

To live thus, free from shame, is no small reward in itself, Euripides would almost seem to imply. We may gain, for honouring the gods, no more than this—to live unashamed before the mighty temple of justice that is within us—yet it is sufficient. Virtue is its own reward.

But there are closer parallels than these between the philosophical assumptions of Euripides and the definite doctrines of Aristotle. Their treatment of the problem of moral responsibility is almost identical. Aristotle is rather jejune; but it will be worth our while to notice carefully what is stated (*Nicomachean Ethics*, iii. 1) to be the definition of a moral act. In the first place, it must be willed; a definite act of will must precede any deed for which we can justly be held responsible. But what precisely, it may be asked, is meant by *an act of will*? Involuntary acts, we are told, are of two classes—those done in ignorance, and those done under compulsion. That there may be no possibility of doubt, the second class is further defined as consisting of acts not initiated by the agent and not forwarded by him—*when they originate from outside him, without his contributing anything*—and the first class (acts done in ignorance) is subdivided into

(*a*) unwilled acts;
(*b*) involuntary acts (done unwillingly);

of which the latter are easily recognised by the agent being sorry for them afterwards. Moreover, the ignorance which excuses from moral responsibility must be what is called "particular," as distinct from "general," ignorance. Every evil man has "general" ignorance of what is right in moral questions. Such ignorance is a moral condemnation of a man, rather than an acquittal of him from moral responsibility. The "particular" ignorance, which acquits a man from moral responsibility, is an ignorance of the particular circumstances, of the persons and things affected by the act. From these considerations Aristotle arrives at his definition of a voluntary act as *an act originated by one who knows the circumstances.*

We shall expect to find much to compare with this in a dramatist who insists, as strongly as Euripides does, upon the internal sanctions of moral conduct. Such is his insistence upon the subjective element in everything, that it almost becomes ridiculous at times, as when, in describing such an objective event as the combat between Eteocles and Polynices, he writes:

> And more sweat poured
> From the beholders than from the combatants
> Through fear of how friends fared.
> (*Phœn.* 1388–9.)

—a remark which indicates a type of mind which gives as much significance to internal affections as to external actions. Examples need not be multiplied. At the end of the *Hippolytus* Artemis *ex machina* excuses Theseus on precisely the ground that the slaying of Hippolytus was an act not originated by him:

> For Cypris willed that this should happen so. (1327.)

What contribution Theseus did make towards the disaster was done in ignorance:

> And thy fault
> Ignorance redeems from being a sin. (1335.)

A similar conviction, that the whole value of a moral act, on the other hand, resides in its voluntariness makes Macaria willing to die for the children of

Heracles, but not to submit to the arbitration of the lot:

> I will not die at dictate of the dice;
> Therein no honour lies. Suggest it not,
> Old man. But if you will accept, and wish
> To use my willing soul, I give it you
> To save the rest; but on compulsion—no!
> (*Heracleid.* 547–51.)

Again, the ideal of friendship, which treats a friend as a second self, as set forth in the later books of the *Ethics*, may be compared with the equally ideal treatment of the subject by Euripides. In the *Iphigenia in Tauris* both Orestes and Pylades are each willing to die for the other:

> This is my friend,
> Whom I wish live as much as I myself, (607–8.)

says Orestes of Pylades, who replies:

> Shame it were for me to live when thou
> Art dead. (674.)

The whole object of at least one of the plays—the *Heracles*—might almost be said to be the inculcation of this ideal:

> I hate the gratitude of friends that wanes,
> And him who wishes to enjoy fair things,
> But will not sail with friends who are in distress.
> (1223–5.)

Though quite Aristotelian, there is, of course, nothing peculiarly so in such a treatment of friendship; it is common to all idealism. But there is something peculiarly Aristotelian in the Euripidean treatment of "nature." His conception of it is saved from subjectivism because it is akin to the whole Aristotelian doctrine of a final cause, of which we must first make a brief recapitulation. Briefly put, this may be said to be the conviction that everything aims at the perfection of its own nature, at the elucidating, out of the manifold of inferior possibilities, of the one perfect thing, organism or ideal; that there is one right to many wrongs, and the realisation of this right or "good" is the "nature" of a thing. The "nature" of man is the realisation of what he essentially is,[1] as being capable of a speculative life and therefore finding his ideal in "becoming immortal as far as possible" (*Eth. N.* 1177b, 33). To fall short of this is for man to deny his manhood, just as with any lower form of life for a thing to "miss its aim," as it were, to fail to realise its nature, is simply not to be itself. A very "positive" conception of nature underlies all this. Matter is indeterminate, but all forms of life are realisations of specific forms out of that indeterminateness—"Nature flees from the indeterminate, for that is incomplete, but nature always aims at an end."[2] The world is so organised that everything is harmoniously adapted—constantly being adapted, perhaps we should rather say—to everything else. There is no blind working of chance, but the orderly evolution of a "fixed series of concepts." "Neither nature nor God ever do anything illogically or idly."[3] As J. A. Stewart says, "Nature is a principle which, by producing ever more and more definite forms, strives to approach the ideal of the divine immaterial form. Plants and animals, which perpetuate their species in young individuals unaffected by the decay of age, are thus said to strive after the divine in so doing. *De Anima*, 415a, 24.

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[1] Cf. the maxim "Know thyself."

[2] *De Gen. A.* 715b, 14.

[3] *De Caelo.* 271a, 32.

The most natural act for animals . . . is to beget another like oneself, animal an animal, and plant a plant, that so far as possible they may share in the eternal and the divine."[1] In other words, "nature" is the principle of the working out of the laws of God here; everything which is according to nature contributes to the divine work, and everything which is contrary to it is thus morally reprehensible. Hence we see at once how Euripides can speak of God as "nature"—"Zeus, whether Nature's Law or Mind of Man" (*Troades*, 886)—or of the "mighty shrine of Right within us,"[2] and how he can regard the nature of man as the ultimate sanction in ethics. Good is more of a specification than evil; it is that which has been determined by the consciousness of humanity out of the manifold indeterminate of life until it has assumed a definite form in the individual consciousness, which by the test of itself can reject this or that human ordinance as bad, or refuse to lend credence to this or that tradition about the gods as unworthy of them. This, or something like it, is, I contend, the significance of the Euripidean treatment of "nature." Examples have already been given, but they will stand repetition. Orestes, in the *Electra*, surprised to find his sister married to so humble a person as a farmer, is yet constrained to admit that neither birth, wealth, nor military prowess provides any safe criterion of a man's worth. Such is provided only by man's own nature:

> In nature lies the test, and in his soul. (390.)

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[1] *Notes on Nicomachean Ethics*, i. 24.

[2] *Helen*, 1003. Cf. *Frag.* 1018: "The mind that is within us is our God."

And Electra agrees with her brother:

> Our natures, they are constant, not our wealth, (941.)

gives reason as well as fact. Similarly, in the *Helena*, Theonöe, when Menelaus appeals to her to oppose her brother Theoclymenus and to aid him in escaping with his newly-discovered bride, is willing to do so, even at the risk of her own life, for she cannot gainsay what her "nature" tells her is just:

> My nature and my wish is to be pious.
> I love my life, nor would I stain the fame
> Of my own father; nor do my kinsman grace
> To reap therefrom an evil name myself.
> There is a mighty Shrine of Right within
> My soul. (*Helena*, 998–1002.)

The beautiful invocation of Hippolytus to Artemis, with its dedication of a wreath culled from virgin fields—an act symbolical of his dedication of himself to her service—harps upon the same theme:

> I bring and give to thee, O mistress mine,
> This plaited garland culled from virgin fields,
> Where neither shepherd dares to graze his flocks,
> Nor scythe has ever ventured, but the bee
> O'er untouched meadow wings its springtime way;
> Where Modesty with dewy springs doth tend
> Her garden, for those to pluck the blooms, in whom
> Full chastity resides, itself untaught,
> While they may never pluck them, who are base.
> Dear mistress, take from my pure hand a wreath
> To bind thy golden hair. This privilege
> Is mine alone of mortals. I with thee
> Communion hold, and speak with thee in words,
> Hearing thy voice, but seeing thee not at all.
> So may I die, as has begun my life. (*Hipp.* 73–87.)

But the most significant parallel between Euripides and Aristotle is that between the nature of the Supreme Being, adumbrated with diffidence by the poet, and the positing by the philosopher of a First Cause, which, itself unmoved, causes motion. Both are alike monotheistic conceptions, and though there is not of course in Euripides any logical justification of the conception, which is, indeed, by no means well-defined with him, yet he would seem here—as it were by a magnificent "act of faith"—to have felt after conclusions to be later established by the closer reasoning of the philosopher. We cannot expect a dramatist to be a metaphysician; he does more than ought to be expected of him, if in his dramas he gives indications of thoughts upon the two great religious questions—life after death and the nature of God—which are at all in advance of the opinions of his age, and this much Euripides, as we shall see in the next chapter, certainly did.

We conclude this chapter with an attempt to determine what "happiness" meant to Euripides. This may perhaps best be done by an examination of the funeral eulogies in the *Supplices*. Adrastus pronounces funeral orations over the bodies of five chieftains—Antigone, the reader will remember, had buried Polynices, and the body of Amphiareus had vanished under the earth—which give a very good indication of what seemed to Euripides to be the ideal virtues. We feel ourselves at once in a world very different from that of Æschylus, who in his *Seven against Thebes* confines himself, almost entirely, to the purely "heroic" or military virtues. With Euripides the case is very different. Of the five chieftains, over whom funeral orations are pronounced, only one, Tydeus, is praised for purely military virtues. Of the remaining four, Capaneus is praised for being no "prouder" than a poor man, as a true friend, and as affable to bond and free alike:

This is Capaneus, whose livelihood
Was sparse; but wealth held not his heart. For he
Was no whit prouder than a humble man.
Whoso did slight the mean, and based his pride
On wealthy table, he did shun. The good
He found not in the belly's store; enough
Was all he wished. To friends he was true friend,
Both far and near. Not many are so made.
True heart and courteous tongue were his; no due
To servant or to citizen he let
Go by. (861–71.)

Eteocles kept his soul by refusing the tyranny of money, and was the enemy of sinners, but not of his country:

Eteocles' the second name.
Another virtue practised he. A youth
Who lacked for substance, in his Argive land
He held high honours; and when his friends would give
Him gold, he oft refused it in his house,
So that he might not yield a servile soul
Weighed down beneath the weight of golden coins.
Wrong-doers he hated, not the state. No fault
To state belongs when evil ruler brings
It evil name. (872–80.)

Hippomedon is singled out for his rustic vigour—not, be it noted, for military prowess—for those sterling country qualities which flourish among country people, which Virgil knew how to appreciate.[1]

Hippomedon, the third
Of these, was in his nature such as this:—
As a boy he spurned to court the gentle life
Or turn to cultured pleasures, but in the fields
He lived a hardy life with joy, and made
Himself a man, going to the hunt with pride
Of horses, and stretching in his hands the bow,
And made his body useful to the state. (882–8.)

Parthenopæus, who is praised for not being a demagogue, was an Arcadian by birth, but came early to Argos:

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[1] Cf. Æneid, viii. 314 ff., and ix. 603–13.

> Parthenopæus, son of Atalanta
> Huntress-maid, in form excelling far,
> By birth Arcadian, came to the Inachus
> And lived a boy in Argos. Nurtured there
> He gave the state no trouble, envying not,
> But, as beseemeth foreigners who come
> To dwell in other states, he did not strive
> In argument—a grievous thing, in guest
> Or citizen—but, like an Argive born
> Leading the troops, was Warden of the land;
> And, if the state fared well, rejoiced, if ill,
> Was grieved. Though loved by men, and women too,
> He kept himself in hand and never erred. (889–900.)

Modesty of spirit, loyalty, sincerity, affability or the social virtues of life, rustic simplicity and hardihood, a contempt of wealth and a hatred of wrangling are thus all traits of character which seem praiseworthy to Euripides, so praiseworthy, be it noted, that they are the points chosen for eulogy in a funeral speech over the bodies of the dead.

We have said (p. 138) that Euripides was a philosopher, as well as a poet, in that he occasionally gives explicit treatment to philosophical speculations; but, of course, he is primarily a poet and his treatment of such subjects is more often by implication—in the development of dramatic character or situation—than by explicit teaching. Consequently, if we want to elucidate his philosophical views, we can only do so by an examination of what is implied in his representation of the character and behaviour of his *dramatis personæ*. Remembering this, let us turn to examine another play—the *Phœnissæ*—which is an excellent example of Euripides' teaching. In it three points are emphasised: (1) religious bigotry is condemned, (2) the ideal value of heroic devotion to a "lost" cause is implied, and (3) love is portrayed as the greatest force in the world. Religious bigotry is represented by

Teiresias—the official exponent of the old religion—who proclaims the death of Menœceus. Creon has summoned him in order to hear what he must do to save his city:

> Thy son Menœceus must thou slay to save
> Thy state,

is the enlightened injunction which religion has to offer! Creon, however, will give no heed to this, and bids Teiresias depart:

> Depart in peace. I need no prophecies
> Of thine,

he says. He has been asked to sink his personal feelings in the welfare of the state as a whole, but he refuses to do so, and Euripides makes us feel that it is right to do so only when the demands of the state are enlightened demands, that the individual may justly refuse a great personal sacrifice if the authority that demands it is an unenlightened authority. In such cases the Lucretian censure,

> tantum religio potuit suadere malorum,[1]

is most applicable. Menœceus, however, is willing to die for his country, and escaping his father's watchfulness, who would send him into safe exile, casts himself to death from a high tower. His motives are excellent:

> I give my soul to die for this my land.
> For shame it were if, when no oracles
> Compel, nor heaven sends constraint at all,
> Others in fighting for their land, before

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[1] For the baser dictates of "superstition" cf. Plutarch's Life of Pelopidas (ch. xxi.), where this very instance of the death of Menœceus is vainly urged by the seers against the more enlightened stand of Pelopidas.

> Their walls, stand under shield, nor fear to die,
> I should betray my father and my kin,
> My country too, and like a coward go
> To other land, and living there seem vile.
> (*Phœn.* 997–1005.)

Such thoughts are unbearable to him, and he quickly comes to his determination:

> I go, to give my country no mean gift—
> My death, and free this country from her ill.
> (*Ibid.* 1013–14.)

In him we see the ideal devotion and heroism of a young and ardently religious mind, which will sacrifice itself on behalf of an unworthy cause. His "soul" is fine, but it lacks wisdom. Euripides makes us feel that his death, though a splendid act of self-devotion, is yet an example of what might almost be called the crime of unenlightenment. The rebuke which Creon addresses to Antigone upon her resolution to follow her father Œdipus into exile:

> Nobility with foolishness is thine, (1680.)

seems, in fact, more applicable to Menœceus than to Antigone.

The third point we wish to comment upon in this play is the power of love. The picture of Jocasta letting Polynices into the city by stealth in order to meet Eteocles privately, in the vain hope that the brothers may yet compose their quarrel at the eleventh hour, is one of the finest representations in the whole of literature of a mother's love; while the power of a sister's and a daughter's love is equally well portrayed in Antigone's determination not to desert her father and to bury her brother Polynices.

A further passage from which we may gather something of Euripides' ideal of life is that in which the youthful Ion recounts the blessings of his seclusion in the temple of Apollo, when Zeuthus would carry him off to Athens:

> What good things here I knew, my father, hear:—
> Leisure I had, which all men love the most,
> And freedom from the throng. No villainous man
> Jostled me from his path—unbearable
> It is to yield to baser than oneself.
> In prayers to God, and talk with men, I lived
> A servant unto joy, and not to grief.
> The parting guest I sped, and welcomed new,
> And so fresh faces always greeted fresh.
> And what men pray for, though unwillingly,
> My nature and my usage made me just,
> As serving God. When I consider this
> I think, my father, life is better here. (*Ion*, 633–45.)

From all this we get a fairly clear idea of the poet's conception of specific virtues and particular moral duties, as also of his general attitude towards life, of his whole conception of "happiness"—a conception with which Aristotle's very Greek apothegm, "we busy ourselves that we may have leisure,"[1] is in full accord. And it is from such reflections, rather than from discussions as to whether the rock midway between heaven and earth of the *Orestes* is Anaxagorean or not, that we can form some estimate of Euripides' value as a philosopher.

We are now more than ever in a position to see that the count in Aristophanes' indictment of him—to the effect that he was the corrupter of the Athenians[2]—is a charge which was no more true of Euripides than the similar charge by Meletus was true of Socrates. And yet in the *Frogs*, after the admission that a poet's claim to admiration rests upon his ability to make good citizens, it is denied that Euripides did so. On the contrary,

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[1] *Eth. N.* 1177b, 5.

[2] See above, p. 30.

> From good and noble men thou turn'st out knaves, (1011.)

the truth of which the reader must judge for himself in comparison with what has been said above. Similarly with the charge that he encouraged empty talk and vain babbling:

> Didst teach men gossip and deft turns of tongue, (1069.)

it must be considered in the light of Euripides' proved hatred of rhetoric.

# CHAPTER VIII

## THE RELIGION OF EURIPIDES

IT is no easy task to elucidate the religious beliefs of any writer, but the reader who has followed us so far will not be without some inkling of a clue which may lead us through the labyrinth of ideas which the plays seem at first glance to present; he will have some feeling realised with sufficient definiteness for us to trust to it as a criterion of what Euripides meant.

In the first place, there can be no doubt that Euripides was a religious man, whether he believed in the gods or not. In the *Heracleidæ* he clearly refers the prosperity of Athens to its spirit of piety [1]; and in the *Supplices* we are concerned with the wickedness of not revering conventional religion, whether it take the form of violating sanctuary or of refusing burial to the dead. Theseus, in the latter play, grounds the whole of his confidence in the success of his cause on its justice:

> One ally do I need alone—the gods,
> Who reverence justice. These with me, will give
> Us victory. But courage by itself
> Means naught, unless the gods are on its side. (594–7.)

and the spirit of reverence is, more than once, applauded as the saving grace of life. Over and over again in the fragments we find Euripides insisting that there is no true happiness to be found apart from reverence for the divine. Whatever "gods" he did or did not believe in, his religious fervour is unmistakable; so much so that R. W. Livingstone in a recent work,[1] while speaking of St. Paul, remarks that "the whole of his epistles are instinct with a feeling which, except perhaps for certain passages in Plato and Euripides, is absent from Greek literature; a passionate hunger for righteousness, a passionate indignation against those who frustrate it." And yet the actual treatment which the gods receive at his hands in the plays is certainly strange. At times they are passionately defended, as in the *Heracles*:

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[1] e.g. 329 ff.; 901 ff.

> Who was the mortal who in his lawlessness was led
>   To flout the gods, and speak at foolish length
> A slander 'gainst the Blessed Ones on high? Who said
>   That in the gods there is not any strength? (756–9.)

but at other times they are abused, as by Amphitryon in the same play, as being even viler than mortals:

> In vain, O Zeus, I gained thee as my kin,
> In vain I named thee father of my son.
> Less than thou seemedst wert thou friend to us.
> Thy mighty godhead I, though mortal being,
> Outstrip in virtue. I have not betrayed
> The sons of Heracles. But thou didst know
> To steal in secret to my couch, and take
> What none did give thee; yet thou knowest not
> To save thy friends. An ignorant god art thou,
> Or justice is not thine. (*Ibid.* 339–47.)

The whole purpose of some plays, such as the *Ion*, seems to be simply to discredit the gods. What are we to make of these contradictions? It is not as though they admitted of the ready solution, which would be obvious, did the abuse of the gods come only from the "villains" of the plays and the praise from the

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[1] *The Greek Genius and its Meaning to us*, p. 26.

"heroes." Such is not the case. Nor does the principle which we have propounded for determining the poet's own views[1] relieve us of all our difficulties. We are meant to sympathise with Ion, and yet he says:

> I must rebuke
> Apollo. What is wrong with him? Does he
> Rape maidens and betray them? Secretly
> Beget sons and care not if they die? Do not
> Thou so. But since thou canst, be just. When men
> Do wrong, the gods send punishment. How then
> Can you with justice write such laws for men,
> When you yourselves perform unlawfulness?
> If you paid penalty to men for rape—
> It could not be, but just suppose it so—
> Thou, and Poseidon, and Zeus who rules the sky,
> The fines you'd pay would make your temples bare.
> For following pleasure further than is wise
> You sin. It is not right to pour abuse
> On men who imitate the handsome deeds
> Of heaven, but on those who teach such acts.
>
> (*Ion*, 437–51.)

Examples might be repeated almost without end, but it is unnecessary to do so, for the phenomenon is familiar enough to all students of Euripides, and it will not cease to puzzle them *until they cease to look in his plays for either an attack upon, or a defence of, the received religion,* in so far, at least, as it was anthropomorphic in nature. The explanation of the contradictions lies in the changed conditions of the age of Euripides. Like Gallio, he cared for none of these things. The great religious questions of his day—questions with which he was almost passionately concerned—had nothing whatever to do with the existence, or non-existence, of Apollo or of any other member of the Olympian hierarchy, as such.

Religion is an affair of human life, of its relation to the great unknown, to that "uncharted region," as Gilbert Murray calls it,[1] which surrounds us on every side. All theological systems are attempted explanations of the mysteries that lie hid there, attempted explorations of the geography of that *terra incognita*, projected cosmographies as it were. Olympian theology is one such projection—a projection first made in the early age of Greece (Homer and Hesiod, Herodotus tells us, were its chartists) and bearing obvious signs of the crudity of an early essay. This crudity is nowhere more apparent than in the low moral standard which it represents, or—should we say?—reflects, from the conditions of the age in which it was made. Consequently it was soon discredited in the eyes of all thinking men. To the average Greek, maybe, it lingered on long after this as the "received religion,"[2] for the average Greek was naturally conservative, especially in matters of religion; but the reason is, not that he believed in its adequateness as a projected explanation of the uncharted, but, partly, that—like "average men," the world over—he never reflected on such things, and, partly, because his *real religion never was concerned with it*. His real religion was provided for him by the Polis, by the service of the state and the tutelary gods of hearth and home. "If a good Greek had his Polis," says Murray,[1] "he had an adequate substitute in most respects for any mythological gods." Upon the existence or non-existence of these mythological gods he never reflected. He took them for granted, and was never for a moment concerned with their "reality." With thinking men, however,—and Euripides was one such—the case was far different. But neither were they much concerned with the "reality" of these gods. They had for long known them, since the days of Xenophanes at any rate, not to be real beings, but mere projections of the human mind, "terms" of unknown value, assumed for the solution of the religious problem. And it is as such "terms" that they figure in the dramas of Euripides.[2] He deals with them—criticises and examines them—as such, but with their existence or non-existence he has no concern. As philosophers would say, his concern is rather with their "validity" than with their "existence."

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[1] See above, p. xvii.

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[1] *Four Stages of Greek Religion*, p. 152.

[2] That it was discredited in the time of Aristophanes is sufficiently obvious from the *Clouds* (816 ff.), where Strepsiades is astonished that his son should speak of the "Olympian" Zeus:

"*Ph.* Thou'rt mad, by Zeus that reigneth in Olympus.
*St.* Ho ho! you fool 'by Zeus that reigneth in Olympus,'
You have reached your age, and yet believe in Zeus.
*Ph.* Why mock'st thou this? *St.* Because I see that thou
Art like a child, old-fashioned in thy thoughts."

That the passage is satirical does not, of course, affect the evidence which it affords of contemporary beliefs.

But he could not begin with a *tabula rasa*: tradition had handed down a body of beliefs with which he had to deal. Let us see how he deals with them. In the first place, he was opposed to the grosser elements of superstition which still survived, in form at least, in the religious observances of his day. Like Plato, he refuses to believe evil of the gods, and maintains that the disreputable legends which have been handed down are no indication of the nature of the gods we should worship, but are the inventions of the poets—what he calls "the sorry tales of bards"—unworthy of credence:

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[1] Op cit., p. 107.

[2] Cf. what was said above (p. 22) about the *deus ex machina.*

> The feasts that Tantalus did give
> The gods, I judge unworthy of belief.
> That gods should feed on children's flesh forsooth!
> The people here, being murderers themselves,[1]
> Do make the goddess cloak of their own fault.
> No deity, I hold, can e'er be vile. (*Iph. Taur.* 386–91.)

it is nothing but superstition that ever made man believe that human sacrifice, for example, was pleasing to the gods, and Euripides is concerned to purge the religious legends of all such superstitious elements. Thus the conclusion of the *Iphigenia in Aulis* is a definite criticism of these beliefs; but the poet's criticism is more often confined to those who have been responsible for the perpetuation of such beliefs generally—which is to say, the priests—than to the discrediting of any particular belief itself. There is no more striking fact in the religion of Euripides than his abhorrence of the priests and all their doings. They have been the traditional enemies of enlightenment since man began to think, so that it is not surprising to find even the easy-tempered Sophocles saying hard things of them:

> Nay, Zeus, indeed, and Apollo are keen of thought, and know the things of earth; but that mortal seer wins knowledge above mine, of this there can be no sure test. (*O. T.* 500–2, Jebb's translation.)

Euripides shows no such suspension of judgment:

> Why deal with priests? With sacrifice to gods
> We ought to ask our blessings and let seers be.
> They were devised an idle bait for greed.
> No idle man gains wealth through prophecies.
> Good sense, with prudence, is the prophet true.
> (*Helena*, 753–7.)

Often enough the priests would be no more remarkable for a high moral standard than were other less-gifted mortals; and this is sometimes made a reproach to them, as when Helen says to Theonöe:

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[1] The reference is to the practice of human sacrifice in the worship of Artemis in the Tauric Chersonese. It is a good example of the "rationalism" of Euripides.

> 'Tis shame for thee to know all things divine,
> Both now and future, and know of justice naught.
> (*Ibid.* 922–3.)

In attacking the priests Euripides was really attacking the darkest corner of contemporary religion. They were largely responsible for the survival of any belief in the efficiency of oracles, of which Gilbert Murray writes: "Of necessity the oracles hated change and strangled the progress of knowledge. Also, like most manifestations of early religion, they throve upon human terror: the more blind the terror the stronger became their hold. In such an atmosphere the lowest and most beast-like elements of humanity tended to come to the front; and religion no doubt as a rule joined with them in drowning the voice of criticism and of civilisation, that is, of reason and of mercy. When really frightened the oracle generally fell back on some remedy full of pain and blood." [1] The attitude of Euripides to all this goes far to explain his dislike of Apollo and of Delphi, as shown in particular in the *Ion*; but, although primarily religious, his dislike may not have been without its political aspect. For Apollo had, through his oracle at Delphi, shown a marked partiality for Sparta throughout the Peloponnesian war,[2] and it is significant that these attacks upon divination are peculiarly frequent in the *Helena*, which was produced just after the failure of the great Sicilian expedition. But it is an attack caused, not by a lack of religious convictions, but by very definite convictions—very devoutly held—of a nature inconsistent with such practices. So far is Euripides from a disbelief in divine things, that it is in them alone that he finds any certainty at all:

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[1] Op. cit., p. 52.

[2] "Now the Spartans had already decided that the treaty had been broken and that the Athenians were in the wrong—and sending to Delphi they asked the god if it would be well for them to go to war. The god is said to have replied that they would be victorious if they waged war with all their might, and that he himself would fight for them both when invoked and uninvoked."
(Thuc. I. cxviii. 3.)

> Nothing certain is of mortal lore;
> The word of God alone
> Have I found sure. (*Helena*, 1148–50.)

Divine things transcend all human affairs, and cannot therefore be harmed by human pollution. Thus Theseus reproves Heracles for thinking that the sun will be soiled by looking upon his blood-guiltiness:

> What is divine thou, mortal, canst not stain.
> (*Heracles*, 1232.)

Such beliefs were part of the old unreflecting superstition, but have no place in the attitude of a reflecting mind towards religion, such as is represented by Euripides. He is a "rationalist" in religion, not in the sense that he will admit only a materialistic explanation of phenomena, but in the sense that he "rationalises" the old superstitions, giving an idealistic explanation of what admits of it, and ruling out what does not. Thus in the passage just referred to, from the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, he explains the indisputable tradition of human sacrifice in the Tauric Chersonese as being due, not to the worship of Artemis, but to the unenlightened practices of the barbarians inhabiting it. It is a similar "rationalism" that finds, also in a passage just quoted, the best kind of divination, not in a superstitious credulity, but in the exercise of the powers which the gods have given to mortals:

> Good sense, with prudence, is the prophet true.
> (*Helena*, 757.)

His position marks an advance in the natural course of religious speculation. Primitive man finds much in his environment which he cannot understand, and refers it all to supernatural agencies. After a stage of animism, man arrives at his first crude theological interpretation of the universe.[1] This is crystallised, as it were, by the early poets, and is represented by the established state religion. We find it in our own Old Testament, and—roughly speaking—in Æschylus. But then comes a period of reflection—in Greece the age of the Sophists—when the solvent of reason is applied to doctrines which have accumulated through long years, in which things were taken "on authority" without any examination of their real sanctions. Reflection convinces us that the real sanction of our religious beliefs is an internal one—a thing is right, not because it conforms with the authority of tradition, but with the "mighty Shrine of Right within us."[2] So Christ, when asked by the Scribes and Pharisees, "Why do Thy disciples transgress the tradition of the Elders?" replies, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"[3] That the disciples of Christ seemed to the Pharisees to be irreligious in that they broke the letter of the law—in not washing before eating, for example—is but a particular example of the general rule that the advance in religious thought, which we are now considering, always seems to the old-fashioned orthodox mind to be irreligion. In modern England we are not without experience of a great religious teacher being regarded by inferior minds, if not actually as an atheist, at any rate as "unsound," and very much the same thing probably happened to Euripides in ancient Athens, though the more intellectual nature of the average Athenian—as compared with the average Englishman—must have saved Euripides from the extreme of misunderstanding. Otherwise, if he had really been regarded as attacking the national religion, he would hardly have been permitted to exhibit regularly at the Dionysia.[1] He is not irreligious, but represents a stage of religious speculation far removed from that of, say, Æschylus. No one could question the moral and religious fervour of Æschylus—his denunciations of iniquity and his belief in the righteousness of Zeus are thundered forth with an intensity of expression comparable with the language of an Old Testament prophet. But can he rightly be called a great religious *teacher*? Does he really add anything to the body of religious tradition as we see it in Pindar and Herodotus? It is no disparagement of his great merits as the virtual initiator of tragedy to say that these questions have to be answered in the negative. Take, for example, his treatment of the religious difficulty presented by the prosperity of the wicked. Æschylus is no Plato to ask us what we mean by "prosperity"; he takes things at their accepted value, and his answer to the problem may roughly be said to be twofold. In the first place, though the mills of God grind slow, they grind exceeding small; sooner or later retribution overtakes the evil-doer, if not in his own person, at any rate in that of his descendants: "So long as Zeus remains upon his throne, this principle holds good—the doer must suffer." [1]

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[1] See my *Elements of Greek Philosophy*, p. 8.

[2] *Helena*, 1002.

[3] Matthew xv. 1.

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[1] It is, upon the view that Euripides is a great attacker of the state religion, a phenomenon to which, as Dr. Verrall himself remarks (*Euripides the Rationalist*, p. 81), we could only find a modern parallel "by supposing that some eminent Positivist or Agnostic were appointed for one Sunday in every month, upon certain terms of reticence and discretion, to preach the sermon in Westminster Abbey." This is to ask much of our credulity, and Dr. Verrall's theories are really untenable on the assumption that the plays of Euripides, "abounding," as he says, "in sarcasms upon the traditional gods," were so exhibited. It is essential to his case that he should be able to prove the practice of private representations, and this is exactly what we find him attempting to do elsewhere! (*Four Plays of Euripides*, pp. 130 ff.)

Secondly, Zeus is not omnipotent without qualification; much as he would like to punish the wicked immediately, he perhaps cannot do so, for he is himself subject to the eternal laws of Necessity; he cannot act against Fate.[2] Such an answer is at once evidence of great religious faith and—be it said without disrespect—of an intellectual shirking of the problem involved. In fact we are still in an age when the intellect has not presumed to tackle religious problems at all. We are still children in the nursery who must be taught by experience that fire burns: "Sufferings are lessons." We are in the atmosphere of the Jewish Old Testament, where "our fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Along with the external universe taken for granted as *de facto* such as it appears to be, a body of religious doctrine is taken on the external authority of tradition as true. This system, which is quite external to man's consciousness, which in some sense it overshadows and overpowers, insomuch as it seems to have grown up apart from his activity, unbuilt by his individual thought, involves the belief in an external, overruling, omnipotent power—a Zeus who stands above mortals, whom he may reward or punish at will. In the conduct of his life man may transgress the laws of this system, may come up against it, and be broken by it: sufferings are lessons. The best thing that he can do is to learn what it is, and abide by it; alter it he neither can nor may.

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[1] *Agam.* 1563–4. Cf. 1658; 176–8, etc.

[2] See the *P. V.* passim. The loss of the two other members of the trilogy is most regrettable in this connection.

With Euripides the case is very different. He lived after the age of the Sophists, when religious and philosophical beliefs were all thrown in the melting-pot. Nothing was too sacred to be assailed by reason. The old system was speedily broken up, and a new one —no longer fixed and stable, bolstered up by the inviolable props of tradition—was gradually being evolved to fill its place. This was, of course, primarily the work of philosophers, but Euripides makes no mean contribution to it. The system is no longer taken *ab extra*, on the external authority of tradition, and no longer involves a belief in an omnipotent Zeus, entirely external to humanity. There is evidence of divine power in the world—Zeus does exist—but he may be very different from what tradition has previously imagined him to be. Maybe he does not even exist apart from humanity[1]; perhaps he is but the divine part of man, the "mind of man." At any rate he is part of a system which does not exist apart from us, but is moulded by man, and is what it is because we make it so. All this is, of course, not explicitly stated in Euripides, but it is a rough description of the advanced stage of religious or philosophical speculation represented by his age, an age that had more to contribute to the development of religious doctrine than is represented by the Æschylean formula of sufferings are lessons. And before we can understand Euripides we must have clearly grasped this fundamental difference between his age and that of Æschylus. It is a difference comparable, in some respects, with the difference between the Old and the New Testament. Such parallels are apt to be misleading, so we must not stress the point. But in Æschylus we have something of the spirit of the Old Testament prophets with their ever-present sense of the awfulness of Jehova, conveyed in most impressive language, but all external to man—without any glimpse of an "internal sanction." Then in Sophocles we have something of the peaceful spirit of many of the Psalms, acquiescing, in beautiful language, with the ways of God to man. With Euripides comes the spirit of criticism, just as in the New Testament we get Christ's criticism of the Mosaic law.[1]

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[1] *Troades*, 886.

If we now turn from the spirit of his age to the plays of Euripides himself, we shall be in a position to understand them. For the elucidation of his religious views it will be most profitable for us to examine both that play—the *Bacchæ*—which contains a wholehearted glorification of the gods, and that—the *Mad Heracles*—in which we see the poet at perhaps the farthest point to which he ever went in religious doubt—in his distrust of the adequacy of the terms used in the projected explanation of the world as afforded by the received religion. Each of these plays must be examined at length; and we will take first the *Bacchæ*, which is universally admitted to be of special interest from the religious point of view.

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[1] This change, from Æschylus to Euripides, is, no doubt, a big one to have taken place within so short a period. But one of the things that make the study of Greek so peculiarly instructive is just this faculty, which all Greek things have—politics, perhaps, more than anything else—of exhibiting a sweeping change within a short compass of time.

No examination of the religion of Euripides which does not admit of a logical explanation of the *Bacchæ* is worth a moment's attention. The phenomenon presented by this play is a great stumbling-block to those who see in Euripides' criticisms of the received religion of his day the rationalistic attacks of an out-and-out religious sceptic; either they must regard the *Bacchæ* as a palinode, and maintain that in later life [1] Euripides came to see the error of his ways and wrote this glorification of Dionysus as a deliberate recantation of views previously expressed, or they must take it as veiled satire, intended not to glorify, but to pour ridicule upon, the religious enthusiasm portrayed. I think that no such dilemma arises, but that there is a *via media* of interpretation.

In some sense the teaching of the *Bacchæ* is the same [2] as that of the other plays, although it is the particular application of such teaching to one deity, Dionysus. It is to teach Pentheus piety towards Dionysus, just as the object of the other plays is to teach this generally. Such an object, in the other plays, is not inconsistent with, but is rather bound up with, criticism of "the sorry tales of bards," which have represented the gods in an unworthy light. It is important to notice that an inculcation of piety was part of Euripides' object in life, for it is their neglect to observe this fact that has made some scholars regard the *Bacchæ* as exhibiting such a *volte face* on the part of Euripides in religious matters. The reader will probably agree by this time that Euripides was at heart a thoroughly religious man. We constantly encounter in his plays remarks such as those of Aphrodite:

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[1] The play was written during the last years of the poet's life at the court of Macedon, and not produced until after his death.

[2] The *Bacchæ* is sometimes regarded as different from all the other plays of Euripides, but the punishment of Pentheus for *hybris* against Dionysus is exactly paralleled by the similar punishment of Hippolytus for *hybris* against Aphrodite.

> Those who respect my powers I reverence,
> And trip up all who show me haughtiness, (5–6.)

in the *Hippolytus*—remarks which are perfectly consistent with the whole tenor of the play, and indeed provide the only possible explanation of the just retribution which comes upon a character in all other respects unusually ideal—or the declaration of Athena in the *Troades*, that she has deliberately deserted the Greeks for the Trojans, because of the haughtiness of the former towards her. That the object of the *Bacchæ* was similar is almost explicitly stated by Euripides himself, for the moral that is drawn is just this:

> For modesty, and reverence towards the gods,
> I think the fairest quality on earth,
> And wisest too, for those possessed of it. (1150–2.)

That this is insincere or other than entirely heartfelt I cannot believe, and the more I study the play the deeper my conviction becomes. A close examination of the description of the Bacchic rites reveals some very significant facts. In the first place it is to be noticed that there are two distinct stages in them, one when the women are merely celebrating Dionysus, i.e. before the herdsmen are discovered spying upon them, and the other after that discovery. In the first stage the Bacchants are not represented as lawlessly mad at all. Rather the opposite:

> There all were sleeping with their limbs relaxed,
> Some leaning back against the trunks of pines,
> While others modestly 'mid leaves of oak
> Lay down their heads at random, not as thou [1]
> Didst tell, describing their wild hunt of Love
> With wine and sound of flute throughout the wood.
> (683–8.)

In fact, the picture drawn is not that of a disorderly orgy, but rather the symbolical representation of an ideal millennium, when the wolf lies down with the lamb:

> And in their arms they held or fawns or cubs
> Of wolves; and those young wives whose breasts were full,
> Gave their white milk, for they had left their children.
> And on their heads they set them garlands made
> Of ivy, oak, and flowering briony.
> Then would one take the thyrsus, and would strike
> A rock, from which did spring the dewy spray
> Of water. Another set a funnel in
> The earth, through which the god sent up a stream
> Of wine. And those who yearned for draughts of milk
> Tore up the ground with finger tips, and drank
> Abundantly. And from their sacred staffs,
> With ivy crowned, flowed streams of honey sweet,
> That hadst thou seen, the god whom thou dost blame
> Thou hadst approached in prayer, at witnessing.
> (699–713.)

Subsequently, in the second stage—after the discovery of the herdsmen—the rites become more frenzied, possibly not without some semi-consciously realised idea of frightening away the profane. The climax, of course, the slaying and dismembering of Pentheus, is no part of the regular Bacchic rites, but a special act of divine vengeance upon one who had mocked at holy things. And in the same connection it should be noted that not even the earlier celebrations can be taken as typical of a Bacchic *thiasus*, as it might have occurred, for example, at Pella, for they are all part of the divine visitation of the god's wrath upon the women of Thebes for their insulting of his mother Semele. This makes a very important difference, which is often overlooked in spite of the definite pronouncement of Dionysus in the prologue:

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[1] i.e. Pentheus.

> And first of Grecian land through Thebes I raved
> With fawn skin girt, and thyrsus in my hand—
> That wand with ivy crowned,—since that whom least
> It did beseem, the sisters of my mother,
> Denied that I was born of Zeus, but said
> That Semele, being wronged of mortal man,
> Referred her wantonness to Zeus for cloak—
> A Cadmus' quibble! And so they boasted how
> Zeus slew the mortal who belied his couch.
> Wherefore forth from their homes in frenzy mad
> I have driven them to dwell upon the mountain,
> And have compelled them don the furniture
> Of these my rites. Thus all the female race
> Of Cadmus have I driven from their homes,
> And mingling with his daughters they do sit
> On roofless rocks, with green pines all around.
> Though loth to learn, this city must be taught.
> It knows not of my Bacchic rites—that I
> Defend my mother Semele, a god
> To mortals shown, whom she did bear to Zeus. (23–42.)

Another point to be remembered is that Dionysus was not an original member of the Olympian hierarchy, so that a glorification of him by no means necessarily involves approval of the traditional theology of Olympus. In fact it is rather significant that the one play of Euripides which is devoted to unqualified praise of the gods should be one in which no regular member of the Olympian hierarchy enters at all. The position of Dionysus in Greek religion was peculiar; he was a comparatively late incorporation, and is generally regarded as of Thraco-Phrygian origin. But he seems to have speedily gained a greater hold upon the heart of the people than was ever enjoyed by any other member of the Olympian hierarchy proper. Whether or no the old Olympian theology ever had any real religious significance for the many, it had certainly lost it quite early.[1] Its polytheistic anthropomorphism laid it open to the attacks of Xenophanes, and after the breakdown of Ionian monism it finds no place in the history of religious or philosophical thought. Now the shifting of the scene of philosophical speculation from east to west which followed upon the sack of Miletus in 493 B.C. coincides with a great religious revival in Greece proper which had nothing to do with the old Olympian religion. Eleusinian and other mystery cults, Orphism, medicine-men, Pythagoreans, the worship of vegetation deities, and many other factors contributed to it, but none of them was more potent than the newly introduced worship of Dionysus. Some thinkers stood aside from this movement, others, such as Pythagoras, took a prominent part in it, while others, including Plato himself, were certainly much attracted and deeply impressed by it. It is, then, highly probable that we ought to regard Euripides' glorification of Dionysus in the *Bacchæ* as a definite result of this popular religious revival. He probably conceived of the worship of Dionysus as adding some reality to the outworn creed of Olympian theology, and so welcomed the new god as the giver of life and reality to a system in which, before his incorporation into it, no thinking man could find satisfaction. Euripides would seem, with a fine dramatic touch, to make this clear by portraying Teiresias—the official representative of the old religion—as himself a Bacchant, who behaves in a most "enthusiastic" way. This probability becomes almost a certainty when we reflect upon the peculiar nature of the worship of Dionysus with its attendant Bacchai and Bacchoi, into whom the spirit of the god in some mysterious way entered so that they became for the time identified with him.[1] Such an identification was the chief factor of Bacchic "enthusiasm,"[2] and involves a, perhaps unconscious, belief in the close relationship of the human with the divine nature. As Dr. Verrall says, "This religion differed profoundly both in theology and in practice from ordinary Greek types. *In theology it asserted the affinity and possible union of the divine and the human nature.* Dionysus was of both natures; he proceeded from the supreme deity (Zeus) not by a single but by a double generation; he was born first as man from the body of a woman, and secondly as god from the body of the Deity himself. The practice and ritual consisted, so far as it was essential and peculiar, totally in *the cultivation and stimulation of the divine element in man* by the voluntary production of ecstasy. . . ."[3] Such is the religion which Euripides in the *Bacchæ* greets with enthusiasm. We have seen (above, p. 132) that he believed in the divinity of man, so that instead of being surprised at the different treatment which the "gods" receive in this play, from that which is meted out to them in the rest of his dramas, we ought at once to recognise that the difference is due, not to any change of attitude on the poet's part, but to the changed "god"—so different from the Olympians—with whom he is dealing.

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[1] By the time of Homer, at any rate, who never hesitates to represent the gods in a ridiculous light, as witness the song of Demodocus about Ares and Aphrodite.

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[1] See Farnell, *Greek Cults*, vol. v., pp. 150 ff.

[2] Cf. Plato, *Phædrus*, 253 a.

[3] *The Bacchants of Euripides*, p. 2 (italics mine).

No reader of this play can fail to notice the way in which accepted wisdom is belittled. So-called wisdom, we are told, may be but foolishness. There are more things in heaven and earth than our old philosophy ever imagined. Wisdom may come from the mouths of babes and sucklings. Certainty is not for mortal men; so let us approach the new god, Dionysus, and learn whatever he has to teach. Such, one feels, is Euripides' attitude, and it is a very mistaken form of criticism which regards this diffidence as indicating any sort of recantation, on his part, of views previously expressed.

But it is time that we turned to the second of the two plays—the *Mad Heracles*—which we have undertaken to examine in some detail in order to find out what were the religious views of Euripides. If the *Bacchæ* shows Euripides as near to what is generally meant by the worship of the gods, the *Heracles* certainly shows him at a point farthest removed from it. In this play the note of doubt which always provides an undercurrent of melody to the orchestra of his dramas, swells into full diapason and drowns all trust in a divinity external to man. It admits of more than one interpretation, but its significance to my mind is that it shows us Euripides clinging even more than usual to the internal sanctions of religion, to what he knows for reality in his intercourse with his fellow-men —to a belief, in short, in the divinity of man.

The story is as follows. Heracles is away on his last exploit—to fetch Cerberus from the under-world—and his wife (Megara), father (Amphitryon) and children have been left in charge of Creon, King of Thebes. During his absence Lycus, a Eubœan upstart, seizes the throne and puts Creon to death, and, at the opening of the play, is about to destroy the whole family of Heracles from fear that one of them may some day take vengeance upon him for the slaying of Creon. The play falls into three parts; in the first we have Megara and Amphitryon—along with the children—taking sanctuary and longing, without much hope, for the return of Heracles; in the second part he returns, hears how things stand with his family, and takes vengeance upon Lycus. For the moment all seems well; but the play proceeds most tragically[1] to Heracles' slaughtering, under the influence of heaven-sent madness, of his wife and children by his own hand. When he comes to himself he thinks first of suicide, but is dissuaded from it, as being a coward's resource, by the intervention of his friend Theseus, who takes him off to Athens. Such are the bare details of the plot. Let us see how Euripides uses it to propound his doctrine of the divinity of man.

In the first part of the play—before the arrival of Heracles—we note a haunting insistence upon the value of friendship. The prologue, spoken by Amphitryon, ends with the reflection that some friends are not to be trusted and others are too weak to render adequate help: misfortune is a searching test of friendship:

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[1] Aristotle's remark, that Euripides is the most tragic of poets, made, as we have seen (p. 5), with express reference to the change from good fortune to bad, is most appropriate to this play.

> Some friends I see are insincere, and those
> Who really are true friends cannot avail
> To help. Such is man's misfortune e'er.
> It is the sternest test of friends, which may
> No friend of mine, however slight, endure. (55–9.)

It is because she finds no hope of safety among her friends that Megara turns despairingly to Amphitryon, to see if the wisdom of his age can devise some way of escape from their terrible plight:

> What hope or ground of safety canst thou devise,
> Old man? For know it is to thee I look.
> We could not pass the frontiers of the land
> By stealth; the exits are too strongly held.
> Nor is there hope of safety in our friends.
> So now speak out whatever plan thou hast,
> Or else we must prepare to die at once. (80–6.)

Moreover, her opening remarks, upon her first appearance, are concerned with the uncertainty of divine aid:

> Old man, who once didst take that Taphian town
> In glorious leadership of Cadmus' spears,
> How indistinct to man is heaven's will! (60–2.)

The Chorus, in their *parabasis*, hint metaphorically at the same conclusion—that the surest assistance we can expect in life is the assistance of human friends:

> Come, take my hand, or grasp my robe,
> Whosoe'er's uncertain step lacks strength. (275–6.)

In the present case they lament over and over again that they no longer have the strength to help the friends whom they would like to help. Thus they complain to Amphitryon:

If any then, when our right hands were strong,
Maltreated thee, most quickly had he ceased.
But now we're naught. 'Tis thine henceforth to plan
How best, Amphitryon, to heal mischance. (312–15.)

The halls of their masters are bereft of friends:

And thy halls are deserted of friends; (430.)

but things would be very different were they themselves young and strong:

Had I the strength of old
  To wield my lance in fight,
Had I my fellows bold,
  Thy children had my might
    Defended.
But now I'm left; my strength
    Is ended. (436–41.)

Even as it is they will never desert their friends. Lycus shall not slay the children of Heracles while they have life to prevent it. *Heracles is not hid so deep beneath the earth as to have no friends*:

For while I live thou shalt not slay the children
Of Heracles. He is not hid so far
Beneath the earth, though he has left his children.
Thou hast destroyed the land thou hold'st, and he
Who helped her has not gained what he deserved.
Am I a busybody then to help
My friends in death, where help is needed most? (261–7.)

Megara[1] thanks them for their protestations of loyalty, remarking that it is meet for friends to fight the battles of their friends:

Old men, I praise you. For it behoves true friends
To show just wrath for injustice done to friends. (275–6.)

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[1] Dr. Verrall has remarked (*Four Plays of Euripides*, pp. 148 ff.) that Megara throughout is less inclined than Amphitryon to hope that her husband will return, for she knows him to be a *man*, and does not believe the supernatural stories about his birth. Dr. Verrall, of course, draws his own conclusions from this, but I submit that it admits of an interpretation different from his. That Megara

There is a strongly marked tendency, then, for all the protagonists to put their trust in men rather than in gods. The objection to the gods, in fact, is just that they are less than human friends. As Amphitryon feelingly says, in words already quoted:

> In vain, O Zeus, I gained thee as my kin;
> In vain I named thee father of my son.
> Less than thou seemedst wert thou friend to us.
> Thy mighty godhead I, though mortal being,
> Outstrip in virtue. I have not betrayed
> The sons of Heracles. . . .
> . . . Yet thou knowest not
> To save thy friends. An ignorant god art thou,
> Or justice is not thine. (339–47.)

It is prompted by the same feeling—i.e. that, whatever happens to the gods, we must keep the divinity of man unsullied—that to the scorn of Lycus about the worth of Heracles he replies, in effect, that the gods must take care of themselves, but man must defend man:

> Let Zeus defend his fatherhood, not I.
> My care is, Heracles, to prove this man
> An ignorant fool in what he says of thee.
> I cannot brook that thou should'st be named ill.
> (170–3.)

But, after all, Heracles does return. The gods do care for mortals, and all our doubt in their efficacy to help is, for the moment, dispelled. Lycus receives his just punishment; Megara and the children are saved, and the Chorus breaks forth triumphantly into:

hopes for no divine intervention, either from her hero-husband or from anyone else, is to be explained not so much by the fact that she distrusts the divine (for in any case the event confutes this distrust: Heracles does return), but by her faith in humanity, her tendency to look for help to human friends rather than to the aid of any external divinity, under the conviction, as we say, that heaven helps those who help themselves. To have Heracles, a hero (i.e. half man, half god), for husband is most appropriate to one who believes in the divinity of man.

> Who was the mortal who in his lawlessness was led
> To flout the gods, and speak at foolish length
> A slander 'gainst the Blessed Ones on high! Who said
> That in the gods there is not any strength? (756–9.)

The triumph, however, is short-lived. A strange thing happens: the forms of Lyssa and Iris appear *ex machina* hovering above the stage, and Heracles is overcome by madness and kills his own wife and children. Our doubt in the aid of the gods was, after all, justified. This intervention of divine messengers in the middle of a play is unique in Euripides. We have already described (p. 22) what we take to be the significance of an apparition *ex machina* in his plays, and the substance of our remarks must apply here. Notice first that Iris has to steel her heart to perform her commission, and is only nerved to do it because she perceives that if she fails the gods will be discredited and man exalted. Lyssa is more outspoken, and openly questions the ways of God to man:

> I would give warning, ere I see her fall,
> To Hera, and to thee, if thou wilt heed
> My words. This man, against whose house you speed
> Me on, is not without renown in earth
> Or heaven. He has tamed the trackless waste
> And stormy sea. Alone he has restored
> The gods their dues, assailed by wicked men.
> Wherefore, I warn thee, work no grievous harm.
>
> (847–54.)

But she is overpowered by Iris, and performs her duty under protest. Now, what are we to make of all this? Surely that the problems of life are not so easily solved as we had been led to imagine by the happy turn of events up to the apparition of Lyssa and Iris. The instruments of darkness often tell us truths. The traditional religion actually ascribed malice to the gods; and Euripides uses this instance of the malice of Hera to witness to something in that divine power, which rules the universe, that passes our understanding, that won't fit into our moral or religious categories for the simple reason that they are not omniscient, but merely human, categories. The ways of God are not man's ways: there are depths in that uncharted region, with which religion deals, that we have not as yet fathomed. Our reason is not infallible. But still, amid this mystery, we must direct our lives according to our lights. Life must be made intelligible to us in so far as it may be intelligible: "For the life that is unexamined is no life for a man"[1]; and, accordingly, the *Heracles* ends—as life so often does end—amid mystery and tragedy, relieved only by the bright light of friendship, to which Euripides would seem to bid us cling, as to the divinest thing we can know on earth. The only comfort Heracles can find in the agony of his soul, the only thing that makes it possible for him to continue to live, is the friendship of Theseus. He has himself done Theseus a great service in bringing him up from the underworld, and now Theseus requites that service by offering Heracles a refuge from his sorrows at Athens. He is not easily persuaded, but Amphitryon pleads with him that the claims of friendship outweigh those of grief; and Theseus pleads at greater length to the same effect:

Why wavest thy hand to warn me of bloodshed?
Lest from thy speech I catch pollution?
With thee I care not if I share mischance.
I have fared well, and date it from that time
When thou didst bring me from the dead to light.
I hate the gratitude of friends that wanes,

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[1] Plato, *Apology*, 38a.

> And him who wishes to enjoy fair things,
> But will not sail with friends who are in distress.
> Rise up; unveil thy hapless head, and look
> At me. The man who is of noble mould
> Bears heaven's blows with resignation (1218–28.)

Friendship covers a multitude of sins: no harm can come from one true friend to another:

> No vengeful curse from friend to friend can come.
> (1234.)

So Heracles is at last persuaded, and in Theseus—his true friend—finds his all:

> For thee, not Zeus, I reckon as my sire. (1265.)

So they depart together; and the Chorus leaves us pondering the fineness and the mystery "of all this unintelligible world":

> We go in sorrow and in tears,
> For we have lost our greatest friend. (1426–7.)

It is all very tragic; but Euripides means us to take to heart the final words of Heracles:

> But whosoe'er would rather wealth or strength
> Possess, than loyal friends, is mad at heart.[1] (1425–6.)

Such is the doctrine of the play—much about the gods we cannot know; but this much we do know, that man can behave in a most godlike manner; friend can love friend better even than himself, so let us cling to friendship, for it is that which, more than anything else, keeps alive "the visitations of the divine in man." As Herbert Trench so finely puts it:

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[1] No doubt some will say that Euripides, being a poet and having a poet's sensitive and emotional temperament, *felt* things rather than *thought* them, and that consequently it is a mistake to seek for a rational explanation of the apparition of Lyssa and Iris. To which I would reply that Euripides was not only a poet who felt things; he was also a *great* poet, who felt things *rightly*. Such rightness of feeling is just the differentia between minor and great poets. Euripides does not himself—at least in the *Heracles*—rationalise his feelings, and he would probably have been surprised to see them explained, but the function of criticism is just to do this—to bring out into the clear light of understanding the dim and vague feelings of a poet.

> Come, let us make love deathless, thou and I,
> Seeing that our footing on the Earth is brief—
> Seeing that her multitudes sweep out to die
> Mocking at all that passes their belief.
> For standard of our love not theirs we take
> If we go hence to-day,
> Fill the high cup that is so soon to break
> With richer wine than they!
>
> Ay, since beyond these walls no heavens there be
> Joy to revive or wasted youth repair,
> I'll not bedim the lovely flame in thee
> Nor sully the sad splendour that we wear.
> Great be the love, if with the lover dies
> Our greatness past recall,
> And nobler for the fading of those eyes
> The world seen once for all!

Our examination of these two plays has revealed a curious fact. At first glance they are perhaps more different from one another than any other two plays of Euripides. The *Bacchæ* is full of distrust of the accepted wisdom of the day, and is devoted to the worship of the gods. The *Heracles*, on the other hand, distrusts the gods, and, through the mouth of Amphitryon, says very bitter things about them. Yet the fundamental idea of the *Bacchæ* is to glorify a god, the primary tenet of whose worship was the mystical communion of the worshipper and the worshipped, of the human and the divine; and the moral of the *Heracles* we have found to be just this—the divinity of man. So far as regards the accepted religion of his day, these two plays may seem to stand at opposite extremes; but so far as regards the religion of Euripides himself they are, as we see, at one.[1] Now all of the religious views of Euripides fall, in relation to accepted religion, somewhere between these two extremes. But we cannot examine each of the extant plays at the same length as we have the *Bacchæ* and the *Heracles*. We must set forth our conclusions more summarily; but the reader is assured that they are derived on the same principle—the conviction that a play is an artistic unity, and that any doctrine which one may wish to illustrate from it must be one that is in conformity with the whole spirit of that play—as has guided us in our examination of the *Bacchæ* and the *Heracles*.

We have insisted that the religious views of Euripides himself had little or nothing to do with the received religion of his day. The reader is therefore entitled to ask—*What then were the religious problems with which Euripides was himself concerned?* The answer is twofold. He was concerned with

(1) the nature of God, and
(2) the conception of immortality.

Let us consider his treatment of these two questions. But in doing so we must always remember that the religious views of Euripides—whatever they may have been—were never dogmatically asserted, but very diffidently adumbrated, by the poet himself. The principle, or principles that rule the universe were traditionally called Gods. Euripides adds an epithet to these principles and calls them intelligent principles, for they were more to him than the manifestations of the blind working of chance or necessity:

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[1] Incidentally this is itself a confirmation of our contention that his religion had nothing to do with Olympian theology as such.

> Intelligent we must consider God. (*Iph. A.* 394.)

Aristophanes in the *Frogs* (893) seizes upon this essential contribution of Euripides and makes him pray to Intelligence in the singular, be it noted, for Euripides himself would seem to have believed in a monotheistic principle, although he often uses the plural (Gods) of tradition.[1] His attitude was one of doubt rather than of certainty, as we see it beautifully expressed in the well-known Chorus of huntsmen in the *Hippolytus*:

> The comfort of heaven, when it enters the heart,
> Can banish our grief away.
> An Intelligent Principle I trust for my part,
> And yet the faith doesn't stay,
> As I view men's deeds on Fortune's stair,
> As I view them high and low.
> The life of man shifts here, shifts there,
> Aye wavering to and fro. (1104–10.)

A similar diffidence is witnessed by the remark:

> For silence is true wisdom's best reply. (*Frag.* 977.)

But in spite of all diffidence Euripides believed quite definitely in what philosophers call a First Cause. As we saw in the previous chapter, this at times seems like the Mind of Anaxagoras:

> The mind that is within us is our God. (*Frag.* 1018.)

At other times it is like Necessity, or even the divine part of man:

> Zeus, whether Nature's Law, or Mind of Man.
> (*Troades*, 886.)

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[1] There seems to be no difference between God and Gods in the tragedians. Cf. W. H. S. Jones in *C. R.*, 1913, pp. 252 ff. But see what was suggested above, p. 144.

Who or what this First Cause may be it is not easy to say:

> Whoe'er Thou art, for us to know is hard.
> (*Ibid.* 885.)

But it is both omnipotent and morally just:

> For on thy soundless track
> Thou goest, and justly dost all mortal things
> Control. (*Ibid.* 888–9.)

At times, it is true, the prosperity of the wicked, and the misery of the righteous, give rise to obstinate questionings:

> What shall I say, O Zeus? that thou dost look
> On men; or that we hold a vain belief,
> Being wrong to think there is a race of gods,
> Since Chance controls for mortals all that is?
> (*Hec.* 488–91.)

but the poet's belief in some divine principle controlling the universe is unshaken; he is a wretched man who shuts his eyes to the truth, puffed up with human wisdom:

> Who is there that looks upon the world, and sees
> Not God? Who casts not from his mind
> The idle talk of those who gaze at stars
> And vainly speak what none can understand?
> (*Frag.* 913.)

It is difficult for mortal man to affirm anything with confidence about this divine principle, but we must believe it to be self-sufficing, just as we must believe the gods to be morally good.

It is not difficult to say what we do *not* believe:

> That gods pursue unlawful love, I hold
> Untrue, as stories saying gods bind the gods.
> I never thought—nor ever will—these true,
> Nor that one god is slave to other god.
> For God needs naught, if he be truly God.
> These are but the sorry tales of bards. (*Herac.* 1341–6.)

Zeus is not anthropomorphic, not, that is to say, a *personal* god. He is often addressed as Ether; and this, or Heaven, is regarded, as in the lost *Melanippe*, as the source of life:

> Not mine the doctrine; but my mother taught
> That once were Earth and Heaven but one, and when
> They parted twain, then did they bring to birth
> And light of day all things that are—trees, rocks,
> And beasts of sea, and race of men. (*Frag.* 484.)

There is a fragment of the *Danaë* which tells us:

> What mortals name the Ether, this it is
> That sendeth forth the summer's light, and makes
> The winter massed with cloud, makes Life and Death.
> (*Frag.* 330.)

Aristophanes in the *Frogs* (892) represents Euripides as praying to "Ether, my nourisher," and Lucian, in his *Zeus Tragœdus*, gives us a proof of what Euripides really thought about the gods, when he could express himself openly, unhindered by the exigencies of dramatic representation. The argument represents Timocles, a Stoic, in a dispute about the Euripidean gods, being confuted by Damis, an Epicurean, who quotes the fragment:

> You see the Ether limitless on high,
> That holds the earth about in damp embrace?
> This think is Zeus, and reckon to be God. (*Frag.* 941.)

Such a strange mingling of polytheism and monotheism, of a personal Zeus with an impersonal Ether, may puzzle the reader of Euripides; but it ought not to do so. For a little reflection will convince him that this is exactly what was to be expected, seeing that the religion of Euripides is that of a monotheism emerging out of polytheism, that of an impersonal conception of the divine principle emerging out of anthropomorphism. Whatever inconsistencies there may be, the general impression one gathers from a careful study of the poet is that he believed in some one controlling principle of the universe—call it Zeus, Necessity, Ether, Mind, Nature, or what you will—which plays the part of an immaterial first cause.[1]

Let us pass to the poet's attitude towards death. Sometimes he seems to think of it as annihilation, as though the separation of the soul from the body must necessarily involve an end of sentient existence. This is far from being a certain conviction with him, but it is to be noted that even this—the lowest conception, in a religious scale, which is to be found in his plays—is a considerable advance, from a philosophical point of view, upon the common idea of death, as something to be feared. It may simply be the end of life, as Hecuba suggests in the *Troades*:

> Death, my child, is not the same as life.
> In life we hope; but death is blank as naught. (632-3.)

But Andromache's reply:

> Than life in sorrow better far is death, (637.)

shows at any rate a conception which is far removed from the conventional Greek dread of a shadowy existence beyond the grave. The remarkable request of Admetus in the *Alcestis* would also seem to imply something very different from the insubstantial existence of what Homer calls "the flitting heads of ghosts":

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[1] See the quotations in Paley's Introduction (vol. i., pp. xxiii ff.). It should be remembered that Euripides was not the first to use the word *Ether* as synonymous with Zeus. Æschylus wrote: "Zeus is the ether, Zeus the earth and Zeus the heavens, for Zeus is everything and more than this." (*Frag.* 70.)

Go then, await me there, when I do die.
Prepare a home that thou mayest dwell with me.
For in the same chest I will give command
That they do place me with thee, side to side.
Not even in death would I be set apart
From thee whom I have found alone so true. (363-8.)

However this may be, Euripides has none of that almost unhealthy conception of a future life, not unknown in some Christian speculations, which is to compensate us for the disadvantages and injustices of this life.[1] He keeps his eyes fixed clearly here, and will not make this life a mockery by shifting its reality to another plane. If death ends all, yet the good men do lives after them:

Their virtues are the monument
Of noble men who die. (*Herac.* 357-8.)

This is at any rate better than that popular Christian conception, which to an idealist such as Euripides would have seemed almost irreligious, shifting, as it does, the values of things here to a sphere beyond the grave, and so taking away all significance from our moral judgments and everyday valuations. Life, if it is to interest me—we can imagine him saying—must be something which admits of an intelligible interpretation within the sphere in which I know it; and it is sheer despair which resorts to an after-existence to compensate us for the anomalies here. And quite apart from this objection—the real one, to any thinking mind—what evidence have we for its truth? We cannot possibly know anything about life after death; fascinating as the subject is, a kind of agnosticism is inevitable for a sincere thinker. All sorts of speculations present themselves as possibilities. Possibly there will be a future cycle of existence only for those who have made themselves worthy of it during this life. This is an idea which must have formed a part of the great popular religious revival, associated with the names of Orpheus and Pythagoras, which swept over Greece shortly after the crude, anthropomorphic theology began to be discredited. But in spite of its poetic justice, it admits of little philosophical defence, and is mentioned by Euripides only to be denied:

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[1] These are admirably satirised by Eden Phillpotts in the character of Jenny Widger in his *Forest on the Hill.* "Heart of man," she says, "couldn't rise to picture a fair return for all I've been through, but the wisdom and justice of God will rise to it." When asked what she would like in the next world, she specifies "a heavenly mansion with eight rooms. . . . Just a nice little lew place in the full sun of His countenance, with as much garden as we had to Islington in my girlhood . . . and just one useful young woman under me to do my bidding, and one useful man for the garden and the hoss. A married couple might do very nice. One horse and a open trap I've always felt the need of and shall want. Or it might be two horses and a covered tilt for winter. But 'tis no use telling about. 'Tis all waiting, and I shan't be much longer afore I enter into the joys the Lord have planned. The prizes be ready. I shall scream out a bit afore the finish I expect, and then I shall be gone to my great reward."

> If heaven were wise in mortal sense,
> A double span of youth had been
> Clear token of their virtue seen
> For all the good who parted hence.
>
> For after death they would have come
> A second time to light of the sun,
> And double courses would have run;
> While single life had been the sum
>
> Of their existence for the base.
> And so the good would have shone clear
> Among the vile, as sometimes near
> The clouds a star doth show its face.
>
> But, as it is, no certain sign
> Of good and bad for mortal eye
> Is given by gods. The years roll by,
> And bring men wealth, but nothing fine.
>
> (*Herac.* 655–72.)

But though this idea must be rejected, Euripides is far from giving his consent to those who, in effect if not in word, assert that there is no life beyond that which we know here. In fact one famous fragment would seem to be quite at variance with what we have said about his finding life here real. It expresses ideas which are commonly regarded as peculiarly Christian, insomuch as it suggests that *real* life lies beyond the grave:

> Who knows if this be Life, which men call Death,
> And living dying? Our knowledge shows us that
> The living suffer, while those who are no more
> Do not fare ill, nor suffer aught amiss.[1] (*Frag.* 833.)

But, as it is a fragment, its evidence, in accordance with our principle (above, p. xv.), must only be admitted in so far as it confirms what may be gathered from the extant plays. From these it would seem that his attitude was one of doubt:

> That there exists another life more dear than this
> We cannot know. Gloom circles round, all edged with cloud;
> While we forlornly cling to this, the Life that is;
> What glistens here on earth we do proclaim alone.
> No other life we know from birth.
> We have not seen beneath the earth. (*Hipp.* 191–7.)

He would seem to have thought that there is likely to be some sort of existence after death; but all that can be said about it is that it will not be what is generally connoted by the word "life":

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[1] I can still recall the feeling—almost of awe—with which I first came across this fragment for myself, many years after enjoying the fun which Aristophanes makes of it in the *Frogs*:

> "Who knows if this be Life, which we call Death,
> And breathing dining?" etc. (1477–8. Cf. 1082.)

In strong contrast to this buffoonery is the approval with which Plato quotes the fragment in *Gorgias*, 492e.

> No life
> Lies with the dead; but consciousness is theirs
> For ever. Eternal ether wraps them round.
> (*Helena*, 1014–16.)

The doctrine that the soul was derived from and returned, upon death, to the immortal ether—possibly due to Anaxagoras—was certainly part of the creed of Euripides. In the *Supplices* we read:

> Let now these bodies be concealed in earth.
> Let each depart, whence each did come to light,
> The spirit to the ether, but to earth
> The body. We possess it but in fee,
> While we inhabit it in life; and then
> She must receive it back who nurtured it. (531–6.)

A confirmatory fragment (971) reads:

> And that, which once filled flesh, to heaven takes wing
> Purified like a star, and spends its life on air.

So much seems clear; but what exactly is meant by the contrast between having "life" and "consciousness for ever"? Paley says: "The poet appears to mean that the soul, after it has left the human body, still retains its consciousness even when resolved into its kindred element"; which seems to me entirely to ignore the contrast. Theonöe is speaking of the influence upon her of her dead father, and the sense is that although dead he still exercises a moral influence upon her. His soul, though it has lapsed into the immortal ether, or world-consciousness, is not dead, in the sense in which the mortal part of an animal dies; though it has no longer (animal) life, it exists as spirit, and so can influence his daughter's soul; for that too, in common with other souls, is derived from the world-consciousness (ether) with which his soul is now once more incorporated. This much, at least, is indisputably implied—a sort of *subjective* immortality or an immortality of influence upon other living beings—but I hesitate to conclude from the passage that Euripides believed in immortality in any more objective sense. He certainly believed in the *immortality of soul*, but probably found the intellectual difficulties involved in the doctrine of the *immortality of souls* insurmountable.

Short as this examination has been, it gives us reason to conclude that Euripides was at one with Plato [1] in his attitude towards the two great fundamental questions of religious speculation—the conception of God, and the question of immortality. The two questions hang together, for God (or Æther) is the world-consciousness,[2] and it is in virtue of its participation in this that the soul is immortal.[3] It also explains what was meant above [4] when we said that the religious system of the age of Euripides did not involve a belief in a Zeus entirely external to humanity.

It would be wrong to write about the religious views of Euripides without insisting upon their tentative nature. As we have said, some scholars hold that Euripides changed his religious opinions in later life, and point to the *Bacchæ* as evidence of this change. Others assert that the whole play is satirical, and not meant as a sincere glorification of Dionysus at all. *In medio tutissimus ibis*; and we have seen that neither of these extreme views is necessary. The *Bacchæ* was the last play that Euripides wrote. It represents his maturest thought, and in it we see evidence of that diffidence natural to later life and a maturer judgment, in the infallibility of reason, which makes Plato, for example, when dealing with the deeper problems of religion or of ethics—such as the belief in God or in immortality—pass beyond the region of dialectic into that of myth, because he would make his appeal rather to the soul than to the understanding. We shall appraise this diffidence in Euripides rightly if we think of the change—or development, as it should rather be called—that often occurs to-day in the religious speculation of a thinking man, when the somewhat crude scepticism of his undergraduate days is followed by a maturer and less confident attitude in later life. The nearer approach of death makes a difference, not, perhaps, to our opinions, but to our confidence in them.[1] And so it is with Euripides in this play; there is no revocation of his disbelief in the "sorry tales of bards" nor any new approval of the previously discredited parts of the common Greek religion. When Pentheus, for example, turns a deaf ear to the representations of Cadmus and Teiresias, the Chorus address a hymn, not to any of the received gods of Olympian theology, but to righteousness itself, the burden of which is that the arrogant confidence of mortal wisdom is not to be trusted.

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[1] It is not without significance that Plato quotes Euripides more frequently than he does either of the other tragedians.

[2] No better example of the unfairness of Aristophanes' criticism of Euripides could be found than the superficial manner in which he pokes fun at this doctrine:

> "The whirlwind reigns, and Zeus is dispossessed,"
>
> (*Clouds*, 828.)

without making any attempt to understand it. He was, indeed, incapable of so doing, for whatever his virtues Aristophanes was no profound thinker, and consequently his buffoonery is of no help to anyone who wishes to make a true appraisement of the thought of Euripides.

[3] See my *Elements of Greek Philosophy*, p. 157.

[4] p. 176.

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[1] Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 330d: "'For know well, Socrates,' he said, 'that when a man is near to the thought of death, fear and apprehension enter his mind on subjects concerning which he was previously care-free. Stories told about Hades, to the effect that the transgressor here must there pay the penalty, stories laughed at a while ago, now torture his soul, for fear they be true. It is either that he is weak on account of his old age, or that being nearer to the things in the next world, he has a clearer perception of them. At any rate he becomes full of fear and suspicion and takes account with himself to see if he has wronged any man. And he who finds many sins in his life, will often wake out of his dreams—as children do—in fear, and lives with evil misgivings, whereas the man who is conscious of no sin has ever sweet Hope, the good nurse of his old age, as Pindar says, at his side.'"

> The tongue that is not checked,
> Folly that knows no law,
> With no success are deckt,
> But bring us misery sore.
>
> But the quiet life and Prudence
> Themselves unshaken stay,
> And mean the home's endurance,
> Though gods be far away.
>
> In the ether they do dwell,
> These gods of heavenly birth
> But thence they can view well
> Whate'er is done on earth.
>
> Vain Knowledge is no Wisdom;
> Thus speaks Humility.
> Brief life from heaven is come,
> And mortal our thoughts should be.
>
> High aim what is to be had
> May miss, and find gone hence.
> Such ways I deem quite mad,
> Such mortals void of sense.
>
> (*Bacchæ*, 387–420.)

In the same spirit Teiresias says:

> About the gods our wisdom tells us naught.
> Traditions old as time, that our fathers knew,
> We have received. No reason shall destroy them;
> Not though the subtlest brain has brought it forth.
>
> (*Ibid.* 200–3.)

Over and over again the same note is struck:

> The wise heart keeps away
> From Wisdom over-bold.
> What common folk do say
> I would to me were told. (*Ibid.* 417–32.)

It is wise to abide by what has been sanctioned by use and time:

> The strength of Heaven is slow but sure.
> It schooleth those who practise wrong,
> And enter not the temple's door,
> But to the madhouse should belong.
>
> For long the gods may stay their hand
> Most cunningly. But so they catch
> The unholy one, who thinks to stand
> Above the Law he cannot match.
>
> No trouble this—to hold most true
> What heavenly things we men have sought,
> What Nature wills, the world right through,
> What custom in long time has taught.
> (*Ibid.* 882–96.)

Some of this may seem strange in the pages of Euripides, but I submit that the above is the correct explanation—a diffidence, natural to old age, in the ability of reason to solve the problems of religion. Well might Euripides have said of himself what the nurse in the *Hippolytus* says in a different connection:

> My length of life does teach me many things; (252.)

for the experience which makes her say:

> And thus I do approve
> Excess less than the Mean.
> This truth I oft have seen
> With those who wisdom love,

applies to religious criticism as well as to everything else. And in conclusion it may be well to remember that this confidence of youth, definitely abandoned in the *Bacchæ*, is criticised by Euripides in earlier plays as well. Thus the servant in the *Hippolytus* says:

> But we—for youth must not be followed thus
> In such high thoughts—with words that suit our station
> Will offer prayers unto thine images,
> O Cyprian Mistress! Thou must pardon him
> Whose young, stout heart doth frame these idle words
> Against thy godhead. Make as thou didst hear
> Him not. The gods should wiser be than men.[1] (114–20.)

More suitable terms could not be found to provide the final words of a study in Euripides.

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[1] Cf. *Phœnissæ*, 529.

THE END

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